

spare Rib

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issue 68 march 78
a women's liberation magazine



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favourite pictures"

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SOCIAL ALTERNATIVES

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL QUARTERLY PUBLISHED IN AUSTRALIA

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Jo Spence
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Our
Week!

Features
fiction
& poetry
Reviews
Regulars



Out in the snow on the First Women's Liberation Movement march on International Women's Day, 1971. This year there will be marches and other events all round the country, including an all women march and celebration starting at 2pm on Clapham Common on Saturday March 4 and a rally on the theme of 'Violence against Women' on March 8 (International Women's Day itself) in London.

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Spare Rib is produced collectively by Anny Brackley, Barbara Charles, Alison Fell, Susan Hemmings, Sue Hobbs, Laura Margolis, Jill Nicholls, Rosie Parker, Ruthie Petrie, Linda Phillips, Janie Prince, Amanda Sebestyen, Carol Spedding, Lisa Viner, Ruth Wallisgrove.

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look what
some joker sent
us!
↓

Mr. S. Ribb,
27, Clerkenwell Close,
London ECI

* indicates that letters have been cut for reasons of space. Short letters (300 words maximum) stand more chance of being published.

APOLOGIES

In the article on the Women's Liberation Bookbus (SR 67), we left out the word 'liberation' in the title and the second line of the second paragraph should have read 'We must not spend all our time on interviews for the media..

How to Fight Life

* Dear Spare Rib,

Several members of the Women's Centre, women's liberation and Women's Aid groups in Norwich received invitations to a closed seminar on abortion arranged by the local Life group (anti-abortion). We decided to attend after it became clear that 1) the invited audience included councillors, headteachers, doctors (including the local gynaecologists) many of whom might not have definite ideas about abortion: 2) there were already two pro-abortion speakers—a local doctor and a social work teacher, neither of whom were specifically concentrating on the woman's position.

At a large meeting at the Women's Centre we decided that someone from our group would speak on the platform for a woman's right to choose, that women with invitations should attend to support the pro-abortion speakers and meet beforehand to work out questions to put to the Life speakers. It was also decided to picket the meeting because it was closed and to hand out a leaflet explaining both this and why we oppose Life.

The meeting was as awful as we expected. Ms Scarisbrick spoke for Life. She was extremely eloquent—every second word was 'killing'. Never once did she slip and call the 'unborn child' a foetus. We were all aware of the very subtle way she put over their emotive argument. Life also had a retired gynaecologist who insisted on telling the meeting how many geniuses were being aborted.

The question time was mainly dominated by women who were pro-abortion. We asked questions on 1) contraception—not surprisingly Life have no policy on contraception. (This seemed to anger many of the people working in the health field and exposes the basis of anti-abortion groups: catholic

morality); 2) pacifism—if they are so concerned with human life, then they must be against war. They have no policy on war; 3) fascism—did they feel that Hitler restricted abortion for Aryan women because of his respect for human life? (We tried to extend this to cover fascist politics in general). They avoided this question; 4) illegal abortion—did they think abortion would 'go away'? Figures for illegal abortions were requested. They avoided this question too (of course); 5) did they really think they could help every woman who had to have a child—she did not plan/want, if abortion was restricted. "Yes," they said! It emerged later in the discussion that they have eight hostels and eight agreements with housing authorities—not much when thousands of women were involved.

We came out feeling drained and angry. We could see the flaws in their arguments but were not sure these were obvious to the rest of the audience. We are hoping to use the meeting as the basis for a play on abortion—so that is one positive aspect.

We went afterwards for a drink in our local Labour Club and met David Ennals there. Several of us questioned him on the recent legislation proposals. He was evasive but implied that: 1) the legislation wouldn't adversely affect charities like BPAS; 2) it was tightening up on the 1967 Act in terms of the private sector, making it a statutory responsibility for the Secretary for DHSS to oversee abortion facilities; 3) he was in favour of increase in NHS facilities; 4) they would not change the conscience vote; 5) that if legislation tightening up loopholes was done now by Labour it would pre-empt another Private Members Bill or Tory Bill (if they win the election) that could do the same things, only restricting abortion rights at the same time.

In sisterhood, Norwich Women's Centre, UEA Women's Liberation Group, Women's Voice.

Up against the Front

* Dear Sisters,

I have been concerned about the approaches in our struggle against the National Front. Specifically, there seems to be an attempt, perhaps unconscious, to discredit anyone unwilling to participate in violent confrontation and to think

only in terms of ends justifying means in this struggle. There are many women who have come to the Movement from a tradition of pacifism, and I feel there is a need to remind ourselves of the credibility of non-violence as an approach and to list some of the ways in which we may struggle.

There is a need to inform the public at large of the less respectable Front activities in our local areas: if the Front smashes windows, beats up paper sellers or spray paints houses, all of which have happened in Brighton, these activities must be exposed in the local press. If the victims feel intimidated support groups should be formed to give us the strength to stand up for our rights. At the same time the press is informed of the incident, the police should be contacted and asked to intervene to restore 'social order'. We are aware of the extent to which the police tend to back up the Front, and if they fail to protect us as citizens, we should then write a follow-up letter to the press indicating our unhappiness with the police in these cases.

There is another weapon: the vote. It can be used to our advantage to keep the Front majorities down and avoid a Ladywell situation. To do this, those of us who ordinarily do not vote can, where a Front candidate is standing in our area, vote for the party in the third position, to keep the Front at the bottom of the list.

As Sue Lee and Angela Todd pointed out (SR 63) "As feminists we wish to question the standard forms of resistance which the trade union movement adopts, and work towards more flexible ways of showing our strength, other than 'brute force'." It would seem to make sense to draw on the experiences of earlier traditions of non-violent resistance and to allow space for those of us who believe ends do not justify the means, as we explore the possibilities in our present fight. In Sisterhood, Carol Lee, Brighton.



In Limbo

* Dear Spare Rib,

I read with delight the 'Reclaim the Night' reports (SR 66)—I am glad that so much is happening, but sorry to find myself so cut off from it all. I am teaching in a small town in Northern Italy, and as far as feminist thinking goes, I seem to be in a graveyard. None of my English teaching colleagues are feminist-oriented (in fact I am often surprised by the ability of women to be totally disinterested in something so vast and relevant to their lives!), and although there is some evidence of Italian women's activities (abortion leaflets handed to me in the street, lots of good books etc) I cannot feel very involved in a practical way—I am not 'local', nor is my Italian sufficient to handle politics yet.

I find this intellectual isolation very irritating and wonder if anyone else living abroad finds a similar problem.

Also, I'd be pleased to hear from anyone teaching EFL who is dissatisfied, as I am, with the sexist content of most of the material being used, and would like to work on alternatives.

Meanwhile, keep mailing my Spare Rib to me—I really appreciate it here. Thanks.

Best wishes for 78, Jean Meyer, CLM, Via A Pozzo 30, 38100, Trento, Italy.

Down with Cliquey Feminism

* Dear Spare Rib,

Having left university I found myself fighting the feminist battle alone, facing opposition from parents and friends and never having recourse to the moral support and reassurance provided by a women's group. This was through no choice of mine. Many times I tried to become involved in women's groups in the towns in which I was resident, and every time I met with discouraging and unfriendly responses. However, the most distressing thing is that mine is not a unique case—I have come across many who have met with the same reaction.

Now I am not prepared to give up the cause just because I find myself alone, but I am not sure that this holds true for every isolated feminist. Ours is a struggle that by definition kicks against established principles, and to withstand the violence of the counter-attack alone takes a strong degree of personal commitment.

I therefore appeal most strongly to women's groups everywhere to make a special effort to encourage newcomers. We need all the help and support we can get—cliques and exclusive clubs do not convince uncertain or hesitant sisters that we offer a more positive way of life. Surely one of the main directives of the women's liberation movement is to encourage feelings of sisterhood and solidarity, to provide reassurance that we women have a great deal to offer as human beings. Such feelings are not fostered by the disinterested rejection of women by their more formally secure sisters. Youfs in sisterhood, Jill Crookell, Doncaster.

Trade Union Pornography

* Dear Sisters,

Thank you for much stimulating reading (SR 65). There is a lot I would like to say. However, at the moment I will refer particularly to the article on pornography written by Ruth Wallsgrove.

I generally agree with the comments. I think the reproductions on pages 44 and 45 will highly delight the authors and promoters of the original photos, as they are getting free publicity.

I do not think we should walk down Oxford Street with our shirts off in order to manifest our anger, but I do believe that we should organise a really huge protest addressed to the prime minister, as

well as to Ms Marie Patterson, TUC chairperson, and all the national executive committees of the trade unions whose members are involved in producing, distributing and in any way handling pornographic material. I do know, from personal experience, that trade union leaders claim to be very sensitive where pornography is concerned. Therefore they should back their words with deeds and ensure that members of their union are no party to the pornographic trade. Throughout the trade union movement women should send resolutions to their executive councils demanding that trade union members should refuse to have anything to do with pornographic material.

Yours sincerely,
Yolande Bevan
London SE24

Scrap the Labels

* Dear *Spare Rib*,
After reading Jodi's letter (SR 66) I had to write and say that I feel her thinking is confused. There is as much shitty treatment from women to other women as there is from men. An example not long ago was from my female doctor who after examining a rash under my arm told me that I was to expect such things if I didn't shave my armpits—hair there is, as she informed me, unnatural and dirty! At college I get a lot of hassles from the female students because I am prepared to stand up for my feminist beliefs. My best friend and constant ally through such things is a man. This guy does not in any way have fascist tendencies and is sympathetic to anyone trying to combat discrimination whether it is sex, colour, race or whatever. Surely doing away with men is discrimination? This guy, who is supposed to be left, has done more to help raise my consciousness than anyone else and that included buying me my first copy of *Spare Rib*!

I believe that it would be far better to try to get away from these labels of male, female, gay, straight. OK, I know this is fairly idealistic but surely the quality of a relationship is what matters not which sex it is. I don't like the implication that some feminists give that if you have a stable relationship with a man you are less true to the feminist cause than if you live with another woman.

Fiona,
Northampton.

Natural not always best

* Dear *Spare Rib*,
I have felt very strongly on the subject of childbirth for the last 3 years, since I gave birth to my daughter. I think the National Childbirth Trust and the other advocates of natural childbirth have a lot to answer for. The idea that because it has a purpose the pain in childbirth is acceptable is totally alien to me. The extreme agony that is sometimes involved in giving birth to a baby (as in my case) is mindbending, and OK it only lasts for a relatively short while, but the memory and the shock can last for

a very long time and could possibly destroy the chances of the mother developing a good relationship with her child (who she sees as the cause of all that pain). I think that epidurals (and the possibility of acupuncture should also be explored) should be available in all maternity units; Often if you have a long and painful labour you will probably be so tired in the second stage that you won't be able to push the baby out properly anyway, so epidurals in these cases would not increase the incidence of forceps deliveries. It should be the woman's decision as to how much pain she can, or wants to, take. Natural is not always best, it is one of many choices. Don't think that you will have 'failed' if you use drugs or an epidural during labour. I stress the importance of choice, I am not advocating epidurals for every woman, unless every woman wants one. If you have a home delivery you can't have an epidural, so you would have to decide in advance, and if you want one go into hospital. I expect what I am writing will be seen as controversial as women seldom express this view on childbirth; it isn't trendy; everything natural is fashionable.

I would like to start a campaign aimed at hospitals and organisations like the NCT to make epidurals freely available to every woman in labour, in hospital and also explore the possibility of epidurals at home deliveries if a woman having a baby at home decides half way through that she can't cope with the pain any longer. Also for more information to be available to pregnant women on the methods of pain relief available.

Josette Morgan
London N12

Wages for Motherhood

Dear *Spare Rib*,
Your article 'Payment for Staying Put' (SR 66) ignores one aspect of the problem ie that wages for motherhood might alleviate some of the symptoms while the revolution goes on.

Change is a timely process. Until facilities to accommodate communal childcare are developed to a satisfactory level and parents and non-parents alike are freed from roles, feelings of guilt and possessiveness towards children, many women will continue to stay at home.

Meanwhile a wage would at least acknowledge the contribution made in the home, free a woman from the dependence upon a partner's earnings, or give a single parent the option to stay at home if desired.

As a new mother I too am experiencing some of the unanticipated feelings mentioned by Gill Hague in her letter (SR 66). Having been quite adamant before giving birth about continuing to study and work outside the home I find that I'm now filled with a great deal of conflict over the question of caring for my child. I feel I'm not ready to allow my child to be cared for by others. (I realise that statement is fraught with underlying im-

plications!) I also suggest there are many other women who feel the same way. So why not help to elevate the status of those of us who still feel they must remain at home with children, and continue at the same time, to push towards a time when communal childcare is the only way.

Thank you.
Lois Gully,
Lemington Spa.

Getting down to business?

Dear Sisters,
I'm sad to see the direction *Spare Rib* has taken: it's so unrepresentative of the majority of women, as are the women's liberation meetings I've attended so far.

Are there any women in Manchester who wish to form a group of a practical nature rather than academic. I am a working class office worker in my late thirties.

Should anyone outside Manchester feel they would also like to write to me, perhaps a newsletter could be arranged for areas where there are too few people to form a group. This would not be provided free of charge. In fact, the 'something for nothing' attitude of some people in the movement is one of the things which gets me down. If you believe that women should stand on their own two feet and not rely on the state as a substitute husband/father, then I would be very pleased to hear from you. One of my beliefs is that nothing is going to change for women unless they go into business for themselves.

You don't have to make a profit but you can allocate yourself a living wage and be mistress of your own fate. But we must first overcome isolation so that knowledge and experience can be pooled by the meeting of like-minds on positive, practical activities. Such people as Geo Wimpey and Billy Butlin didn't make their economic independence by sitting around discussing body hair and penis.

Yours sincerely,
J Ecroyd (Ms),
27 Clifton Walk,
Langley, Middleton,
Lancs.

More about Professional Women

Dear *Spare Rib*,
Some comments:

1 We may be a minority of women as a whole (though probably not of your readership) but I would like to see more about professional women and the tensions etc of working with men where there is little or no overt discrimination.

2 Articles in current issue (SR 66) on hair and 'sexy' clothes—typical of superficial/trivial articles that mar the magazine. I know I still have plenty of 'feminine' hang ups but obvious, concrete absurdities like hair and high heels are easily conquered alone by determined intelligent women. What about more insidious problems of speech, behaviour, psychology, lack of confidence?

Rachel Sanger,
London SW12.

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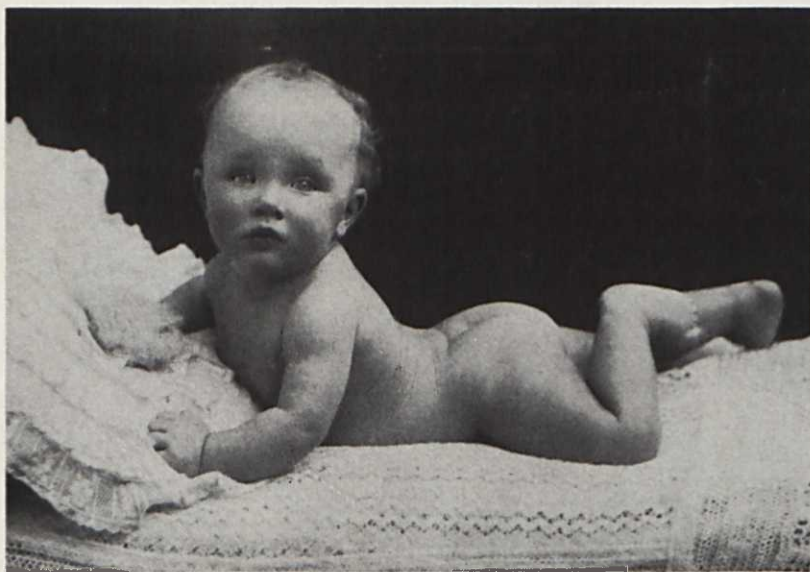
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FACING UP TO MYSELF

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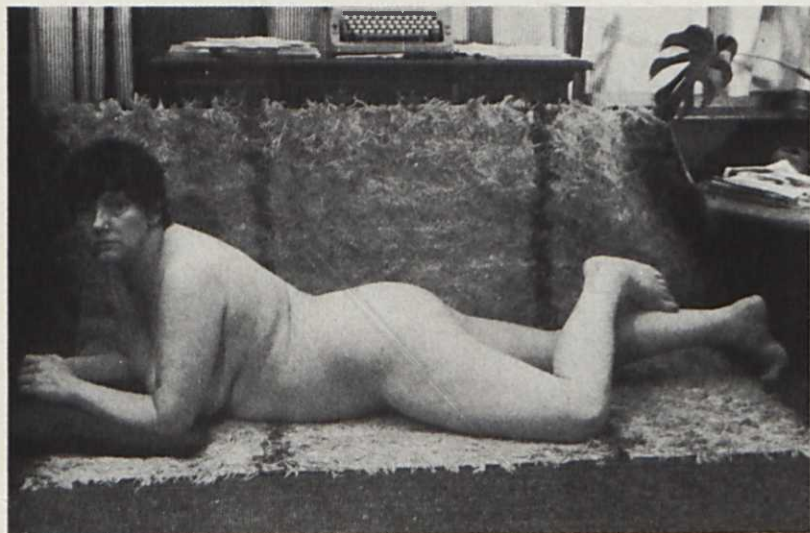
Jo—8 months

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHER



Jo—3 years

AN UNCLE



Jo—43 years

TERRY DENNETT



Shirley Temple

FILM STILL

"We never get ourselves photographed in the nude unless we happen to be 8 months old. I think you can subvert that convention without turning yourself into a sex-object."

"I think it's important to look at where you got your ideas about how you look, and what your mother looked at when you were growing up."

All my life I was ashamed of the way I looked. And even though I had a good-shaped body (judging by the responses to it) I was so sexually repressed that I spent all my time hiding it. I made a decision pretty early on that people would have to discover the 'real' Jo, that they would have to break through the exterior messages I was sending out. Where the roots of this shame came from I still don't remember, but I'm beginning to understand.

That's the background to this series of photographs.

I left school at fifteen, and started work as a dogsbody in a photography studio. I watched photographers manipulating people into what I now know to be stereotypes . . . I fell into that trap when I first started taking pictures.

Some years later I took up portrait photography and realised that a single image could not convey someone's essence. I obviously couldn't spend 24 hours with sitters so I tried to discover



SIDNEY WEAVER

'Girl-next-door'—Jo at 24



PETER URRY

Portrait by first boyfriend—Jo at 17

(and this took a long time to evolve) how they saw themselves, and how other people saw them. I would say "put on a face that your mother likes", and "How do you look at yourself in a mirror?" And a whole repertoire of expressions would emerge.

Then I got involved with a group that was concerned with the socialisation of children. It dawned on me that I had made people perform in the studio in the same way as adults forced children into performing. So I stopped being a portrait photographer. I wanted to be able to show what really goes on, and imagined spending 24 hours with someone, photographing their day—showing it as it is.

But I discovered more problems—I found that people didn't like most of my photos of them because of their preconceptions. I also realised that I couldn't show complex relationships like power structures in the family without appearing to be critical. In addition, a photograph of a woman battering her child doesn't give any indication of the root of the problem, the wider social and economic issues involved. I thought I might as well give up photography if I couldn't adequately convey what I was looking at (that's always assuming that I understood what I saw in the first place).

I began to think of my own image and of all the women I had photographed who said they didn't like the way they looked; some of them were in the women's movement and aware of women's oppression. I found this very contradictory. I put a note about this in *Spare Rib* and had ten replies within a week. Eight of us then formed the 'Faces' group. We talked about our self images, and we talked about how



MICHAEL WYNNE

A last fling at 'The Look'—Jo at 29

we saw each other. There seemed to be a credibility gap between the two views. One day we all made each other up and took pictures. Some of us felt uncomfortable and thought it was an indulgence. One woman had always wanted to be a bride, but had never really admitted it before. She didn't want a husband, she just wanted a white dress and all the trimmings. The white make-up had sparked it off, so she did it.

I then started looking at my image in a wider context and became aware of 'the

Look' the media has created for women—the full-faced come-on, a full-frontal attack. You don't see many active images of women around; it's your face that represents you. And the eyes say 'I'm available'. Wearing glasses is tantamount to wearing a mask; it cuts off 'The Look'... that's why I'm glad now I wear them.

It only recently occurred to me that all my early photographs were about 'come-on'. We are supposed to spend all our time, energy and money trying to look perfect. When we've achieved that 'peak'

FACING UP TO MYSELF



'FACES' GROUP

'Aging tart'



'FACES' GROUP

'Tart'—mark 2

we have to worry about 'keeping our looks'. But life's not like that. We are constantly changing. The mirror image shown to working women is totally static. It represents an ageless, classless view of people with different lifestyles and values.

Looking at myself in that way—visually, I mean—I can see my own depressions and bad patches as part of a process, which I can gradually understand and come to terms with. Now that the women's movement is beginning to influence our ideas a whole new set of more realistic images of women is emerging: women in struggle, women demonstrating, picketing, demanding, caring. But what about the gap between the media 'Look' and this new set of images? How do we change and in what way? We need a whole spectrum of images to show the bridge.

The problem for me was to understand how and to what extent my view of reality has been constructed and influenced by the mass media. We are slaves of what

we think we ought to look like, and how we think we ought to behave. When is an image idealised and when does it become realistic? Look at the pictures of women who are labelled as 'problems'—they are all over the place—charities use them all the time. These aren't idealised: they are very 'realistic'. But they are always linked to some sort of 'abnormality' or 'deviance'. So nobody in their right mind preserves pictures of themselves looking like that because of the connotations with 'failure'. What we need to do with our own pictures and with our own self image if you like is to shift the emphasis back to a point where we understand that everything we do as women has a validity—not just the perfect moments. In this way we can then start to rethink some of the syndromes or stereotypes that have been thrust upon us. I think we are the slaves

'Faces' group: "One day we all dressed up and painted each other's faces. I was terrified when I saw myself as an 'aging tart'. Some women in the group forced me to re-look at myself and helped me to change my clothes. For the first time in my life I began to enjoy being open about my sexuality."



MICHAEL ANN MULLEN

Feminist portraits

of our own idea of what we ought to look like, and by implication behave like. That's the real problem, how to make the shift.

I really started facing up to myself when I looked at the random pictures Terry had been taking of me. I feel sure some of them could have been used to raise money for charities! I have also realised now that what I look like at home is different to what I look like out of doors; I have a public and a private face. And I know that I look a wreck when I wake up in the morning, but I also know that the first person I meet changes the way I look. The photos here don't show any interaction. In the real world you are interacting all the time.

Like therapy, it happens step by step, slowly uncovering the layers of fear and repression. It's even harder to get other people—friends and family—to understand



TERRY DENNETT

Late night

"These photographs were taken by Terry (who I live with), who started documenting my life without me realising it. It showed me a whole other side of me that I'd never been able to face up to before. Some of them are my favourite pictures."



TERRY DENNETT

When my hair fell out



TERRY DENNETT

An attack of hayfever on washing day



TERRY DENNETT

A time you never see yourself

that their conceptions of us are stereotyped. Photography can force a lot of this out into the open. If we can accept how we are, then others will have to try to adjust. Putting these photographs in my album has forced my family to see me in a new way.

The pictures aren't an end in themselves, just a means of trying to understand what I project of myself, then I can know what I'm dealing with. They have provided a new armour of knowledge about myself—now I feel stronger about how I'm experienced and how I experience myself. And it's affected the way I think and behave. If I can accept the way I look, I can cope with the world and get on with other things.●

Jo Spence, Laura Margolis, Anny Brackx



APOLOGIES to Michael Ann Mullen who wasn't credited for taking photos of Beryl Weaver's work (SR 66) and to Neil Martinsen (Hackney Flashers) who photographed a catering worker.

ANTI-ABORTIONISTS ATTACK:

Our legal rights and menstrual extraction

Anti-abortion campaigners are continuing their efforts to prosecute liberal doctors and gearing up for an onslaught on the 1967 Act in the next parliamentary session.

Sir Bernard Braine, Conservative MP for SE Essex is introducing a bill on February 21 under the 'ten minute rule'. The bill—which calls for a reduction in the 28-week limit, controls on charity abortion agencies and pregnancy testing bureaux, and strengthening of the 'conscience clause' for doctors who don't want to do abortions—has little chance of becoming law, because just one MP shouting "I object" prevents it being voted on. But Braine is introducing it to get a vote on whether MPs want to see the law tightened *next* session.

Outside the Commons their latest victim is a doctor who has been running a 'menstrual aspiration' service in an NHS hospital in the Manchester area. The doctor wrote an article on 'Ten Minute Abortions' in the *British Medical Journal*, describing how his service was organised and pointing out the advantages of giving women access to a safe simple procedure within 10-18 days after a missed period.

After reading the article, someone whom the police refuse to name complained to the Greater Manchester Police, whose Chief Constable, James Anderton, is well known for his religious fervour and authoritarian views on pornography, law and order. The police duly made a report on the menstrual aspiration service which was passed on to the Department of Public Prosecutions.

The case would apparently be based on the fact that the doctor signed the forms authorising an abortion under the terms of the 1967 Act although the women had not had pregnancy tests. As the abortion law assumes that abortions are carried out only on pregnant women, it could be argued that if any of the

women turned out not to have been pregnant, the doctor could be guilty of making a false declaration under the terms of that Act. However, it could equally well be argued that according to his clinical judgement, the women *were* all pregnant. As a doctor's clinical judgement is virtually unassailable in law, this would be a very strong defence.

But, whatever the fine points of the law, the doctor has now been intimidated into closing down his service. So the DPP have decided not to institute proceedings and doctors are no clearer about whether or not menstrual aspiration is legal.

Feminist lawyers are studying the law to see what amendments should be made to clear up this ambiguity and establish the right of doctors to set up menstrual aspiration services.

The Manchester National Abortion Campaign group is holding a public meeting and writing to local MPs etc asking why the service has been stopped. It is absurd that the safest and least traumatic method of abortion should be outlawed because of the phrasing of notification forms. It just shows the lengths to which anti-abortionists are prepared to go in sabotaging abortion services.

Marion Bowman and
Angela Phillips



Housing 'Let Live'

On January 25 about 250 people picketed a meeting of Hackney Council, London. The picketers, who included Hackney NALGO Action Group and local feminist groups, were protesting about the support the Council is giving to the anti-abortion organisation 'Let Live'.

Set up in 1972 after a meeting of the 'Southwark Union of Catholic Mothers', 'Let Live' provides 'counselling' and accom-

Spina bifida screening

Almost every pregnant woman suffers from the fear that her child could be born deformed in some way. If it were possible early in pregnancy to get a simple blood test which screened for the possibility of deformity, how many of us would gratefully make use of that service and, if the tests proved positive, consider an abortion?

Well, as it happens, just such a test has been developed to screen for Spina Bifida and Ancephaly, both afflictions which affect the nervous system of the baby leading either to permanent deformity or early death. The test measures the level of Alfa-Fetaprotein in the blood. In a pilot study 80% of women carrying Spina Bifida babies had higher than normal AFP rates. This screening is followed up by amniocentesis in which a sample of amniotic fluid is examined for an even more accurate diagnosis. Women are offered the option of abortion if the tests prove positive.

Not only is this blood test simple and safe, it is also cheap. So are the DHSS rubbing their hands with delight and rushing to implement a national service? Not at all. Roland Moyle (Secretary of State for Social Services) considers

it "premature for me to make a decision about encouragement or financial assistance at this stage".

The organisation which appears to have put a spanner in the works is the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists who feel that the DHSS should 'make haste slowly' in implementing a screening programme. The reason for this caution is that an unnamed doctor in an unnamed hospital is concerned that the process of amniocentesis can itself cause miscarriage and that in three cases an aborted foetus turned out to be normal in spite of positive tests. These statistics have been contested. Two other studies have shown a mis-diagnosis rate of 0.1% and no higher than usual rate of miscarriage. British studies are not yet complete but are likely to show similar results.

The motives behind these objections are dubious. Even if amniocentesis does prove marginally less trouble-free than had been thought, given the accuracy of the initial screening, few women carrying normal foetuses would be exposed to the risk of accidental miscarriage or false positive diagnoses through amniocentesis. Surely it should be up to the pregnant women to choose whether or not to undergo amniocentesis in the circumstances. Probably few would decide against it if they had already had a positive blood test.

Raymond Booth, Secretary of the RCOG, makes his position clear. His concern is not with the problems faced by the parents of handicapped children, nor with the misery of still birth. He is concerned only that "if we abort normal babies, we shall put the clock backwards, not forwards". I doubt that the thousands of women who could be relieved of at least some of the fear of bearing handicapped children would agree with him. No woman should *unknowingly* give birth to a child that will die at birth or be retarded for life when facilities exist which would provide her with that information in time to make a choice.

Angela Phillips

* Five women arrested last July for protesting outside Parliament against Benyon's anti-abortion Bill (four of them chained themselves to the railings) have been charged with obstruction and fined £10 each with £10 costs...

An Dekker



Squash the Juicy Fruity ads — they're back, SPUC burns out but so are we.

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) has won its case against the authors and publishers of *Babies for Burning*, in which members of SPUC accuse BPAS, among others, of facilitating illegal abortions and employing doctors who deliberately tell women they are pregnant when they're not (see SR 36).

The authors made statements in open court withdrawing these and other allegations. Copies of the book have been withdrawn and any further publications must have substantial sections omitted. A settlement was made out of court—it was obvious BPAS would have won in a trial.

So it's proved that SPUC is willing to use lies to smear pro-abortionists. The settlement, however, has not covered the many pre-trial expenses BPAS incurred. The case had to be fought with funds desperately needed to keep the cost of private care low, especially for the poorer women whom BPAS helps. BC

Donations to: BPAS, Austy Manor, Wootton Waven, Solihull, West Midlands B95 6DA.

Battering and the courts

Remember the recent 'victory' for women's rights over property rights when an Appeal Court judgement set aside previous decisions by ruling that an unmarried battered woman could exclude the man she'd been living with from their council flat?

Of course the man appealed to the House of Lords, on the grounds that Parliament never intended the Act to deprive an Englishman of his castle. The National Women's Aid Federation and Rights of Women picketed outside, and the law lords went away to think about it. They still haven't announced their decision.

Meanwhile, the NAWF, unhappy about the way the eight-month-old Domestic Violence Act is being interpreted, are trying to collect evidence about it. Basically the Act means that a battered woman no longer has to take out divorce or assault proceedings before applying for an injunction

and that police can now, if the judge so instructs, arrest a man who breaks such an injunction. The NAWF wants to find out what's happening in the courts so as to work out what the situation is for women who rely on injunctions as their sole means of protection. They hope to cover every county court in London—or ideally in the whole country—every day for at least two weeks. With the permission of the woman concerned and her solicitor, they'll note down facts and impressions about the case.

For this major undertaking they need scores of volunteers willing to spend a day, a week or as long as they can manage sitting in a county court taking notes! If you can help, contact NAWF, 51 Chalcot Rd, London NW1 (01-586 0104/5192). Two London meetings are planned: in North London on March 6 and South London on March 9. JN

Rape Judge challenged

Ten of twelve jurors involved in a rape case at Manchester Crown Court recently wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* accusing the judge—Sir Robertson Crichton, now retired—of being unsympathetic to the girl and virtually deciding the case himself, using them merely as his mouthpiece. Two brothers were acquitted of rape, indecent assault and grievous bodily harm.

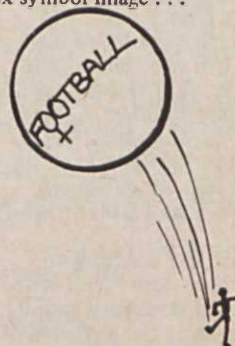
On the first day of the trial, after hearing the girl's evidence, the judge said there was no case to answer, but the jury insisted on continuing. After two days of prosecution evidence, the judge recommended a not guilty verdict, on the grounds that there was insufficient "corroborative evidence". Later the jury took the unusual step of challenging the judge's authority and making their distress known. JN

Anonymity rule waived

An Old Bailey judge, James Miskin QC, has ordered that the name of a woman in a rape case be given "as much publicity as possible" before the case is tried. But women in rape cases have anonymity under the Sexual Offences Amendment Act 1976. Why has the rule been waived? It's claimed that the woman is a prostitute so by publishing her name the defendant can get witnesses (presumably previous 'clients') to come forward.

A prostitute must have the same rights as any other women in rape cases. Her occupation and 'morals' have nothing to do with it. The defendant's pastimes (such as going to prostitutes) won't of course be judged in the same way. Incidentally, the man (not named) is a company director. BC

* 11-year-old Theresa Bennett is tackling the Football Association's ban on mixed matches for the under-12s. She was due to play this winter for North Muskham United, her village team, but just before the first match Nottinghamshire FA ruled against mixed football, supported by the FA's London headquarters. Theresa appealed to the EOC, who offered financial assistance so she could bring a case. Reading this item on the television news, Angela Rippon broke her ice barrier to imply that some girls might want to play football but she didn't—a sneaky way to boost her sex symbol image...



* One more frustration winging its way to the EOC... Susan Corke from Cardiff, in the lounge at the Maltsters Arms with her parents and fiancé, ordered a round of drinks—two pints of dark, and a pint and a half of lager—and was asked if the pint of lager was for a lady. It was, so the landlady refused to serve it—"If you want to drink like a man, go into the bar." It's not exactly that the Sex Discrimination Act doesn't apply to pubs, but licensees can choose who they wish to serve...



* The only good thing to happen at Grunwick's lately... Jayaben Desai won her appeal against a conviction for assault on the Grunwick picket-line. The charge was totally ludicrous—it's amazing that Willesden magistrates' court ever accepted it. Ms Desai, 4'10" tall, was supposed to assault the considerably taller Malcolm Alden, one of the managers, over a 5' high locked gate. The only witness was Grunwick boss George Ward!

CARTOONS BY LESLEY RUDA

Miles from Mile End

Women still shudder at the memory of the last Women and Socialism National Conference at Mile End, London in 1976. So the Socialist-Feminist Conference in Manchester loomed up with many of us feeling a mixture of guarded anticipation and anxiety. We knew it wouldn't be a repeat performance of disunity and domination by left-wing groups, of huge open sessions in which we were engulfed by papers declaring fixed positions with no discussion. But nor did anyone feel certain that the resurgence of socialist-feminism, expressing itself through local action and/or study groups, regional meetings and educational, would allow us a wider optimism.

Overall, the conference seemed to be concerned with questions of structure and organisation at the expense of much that was new in theory and strategy. And there were no Eureka's for a new way forward. So why did most of us come away feeling optimistic and reinforced? Well, there were 1,000 women there and that was impressive. In Saturday's workshops we talked about what it means to define ourselves as socialists and feminists, what our place was within the Women's Liberation Movement, and our relationship to the left as well as whether we wanted a national structure, and if so, what sort. On Sunday, the workshops dealt with more concrete themes and campaigns. Exchanges about



ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

hospital closures, rape, women's aid, reproduction, Ireland—and much more—were amicable and constructive. Then, too, a decision was taken to hold a conference next spring; and *Scarlet Women* will shift away from being a socialist-feminist bulletin to becoming a discussion journal. It'll have an enlarged contributing network through regional correspondents, a more regular schedule and be circulated through feminist outlets and shops rather than just by subscription.

Concrete activities are emerging from it too. New discuss future strategy, and new socialist-feminist groups have begun meeting. So it seemed a confirming and consolidating weekend.

Ruthie Petrie



ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

"What does it mean to define ourselves as socialists and feminists?"

Subversive Secretaries

What can you do when everyone, including the management and your union, says they agree you should get a wage increase—but after seven months you're still waiting for the union to arrange to meet the management? If you aren't in a position to disrupt by striking unofficially? Well, if you are a secretary through whose hands all correspondence passes... you can embarrass. Secretaries at the *Times* are publicising their appalling wages by writing on letters and putting stickers on the envelopes they send out, saying things like "Top paper, bottom rates", and sticking up posters in lifts and on the outside of the building when anyone 'prominent' comes to visit. They have also inundated management

with memos detailing their living expenses, and written to all other papers.

At the moment they get about £35 a week take-home pay: all could get twice that pay elsewhere, and in the last two years 132 secretaries in the union, the National Society of Operative Printers, Graphical and Media Personnel, have left the *Times* to do so. It's a responsible job, which can even involve compiling sections of the newspaper, but it's seen as a "nice" job for a "nice" sort of girl who should work not for pay but for the glory of being associated with such a prestigious institution.

Since the secretaries agreed to press for higher wages last year, no-one from union headquarters has been to see them or the management. The women say they were told to stop writing to their union branch because they are "annoy-

ing" the union: "It's really depressing—we feel like we're having to fight the people who should be fighting for us." The union seems not to take their grievances seriously because they are in a 'woman's' job and appear not to have industrial muscle. Secretaries and clerical workers can't stop production instantly—but there are some things they are in a perfect position to do. Ruth Wallsgrove

ROW - landed in it

Rights of Women have been told that their £3000 grant from the EOC, awarded last March, will not be renewed this year. This unexpected decision really lands them in it—they've only been paying office workers (one and a half of them) for four months and have just launched a series of free workshops for women.

Other government departments approached for money—like the Voluntary Services Unit—won't cough up, saying the EOC is now responsible for women. JN ROW, 2 St Pauls Rd, London N1 (01-359 6656)

* The Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Action Committee has won its first victory with the Camden and Islington Area Health Authority—at a meeting on February 6, the AHA said it had decided *not* to transfer the EGA hospital to the Whittington. The next step is the fight for special funds from the Department of Health, to keep it open on its present site, which the AHA say they have applied for.

NEWS COPYDATES

SR69—Feb 23

SR 70—Mar 30

If it's urgent, it's worth trying after these dates.

Women's Devolution

What impact will the Scottish Assembly have on women in Scotland? Will it signal a triumph for dour (and masculine) Presbyterianism, or is it an opportunity for progressive reform? In recent years social reforms have often been slow to come to Scotland, because the Westminster Parliament simply did not have enough time. When reform did come, it frequently slavishly followed the English example, as with divorce reform. The Scottish Assembly should have ample time to legislate on matters of concern to women. Experiences of countries other than England could be drawn on.

But changes favourable to women will not happen unless women and men in Scotland have proposals and ideas to bring forward to the Assembly. To encourage discussion and the drawing up of suggestions, the Scottish Council for Civil Liberties and the Edinburgh Women's Campaign for Legal and Financial Independence are organising a series of Saturday afternoon workshops in Edinburgh. The first, on March 11 at 1.30, is about violence against women, rape and battering. The workshops will be held in Canongate House, Castle Hill, Edinburgh (next door to the castle).

Anne Scott

Further information from Anne at 131 Montgomery St, Edinburgh EH7 (031-661 7315).

Running a Business?

Hilary Burton is, or was, a child-minder, working in her own home—which has good facilities for children, including a garden with outdoor play equipment. But the firm which built Hilary's home and those around it have taken her to court for running a business in her home. This was after neighbours complained about the noise made by children playing.

She lost the case. About £400 of legal costs have been awarded against her, and she can no longer work as a childminder. She is applying for legal aid to pay for an appeal. If she wins she may not have to pay the £400. York Women's Centre is asking for donations to help her fight the case and pay the costs if necessary. If the court's decision is taken as a precedent, it could mean even fewer facilities available for child-care.

York Women's Centre, 32 Parliament St, York.



Racist Finance Act

Last year's Finance Act contained legislation that will mean thousands of immigrants with children living abroad will lose most of their child tax allowance and get nothing to compensate for it.

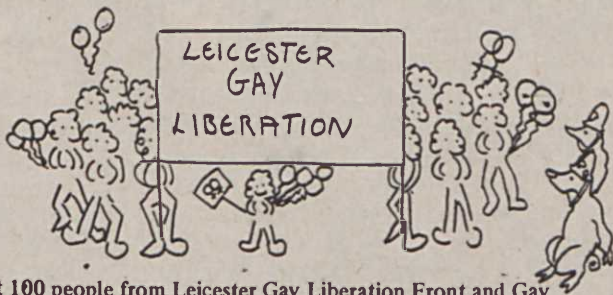
At present someone living in Britain with two children in India, for example, gets £2-£3 tax allowance, but as from April this will be reduced to about £1 and by April 1979 phased out completely. This will make it even harder for immigrants to save up and bring their families

over. The bureaucracy entailed in trying to get a family over here is bad enough—it can take two years or more—let alone adding further tortures.

Of course people from European countries, where 'reciprocal arrangements' exist with Britain, will be able to claim the extra child benefit. The families that will suffer will be those from countries like India, Africa, Latin America, the West Indies... the poorer ones.

Barbara Charles

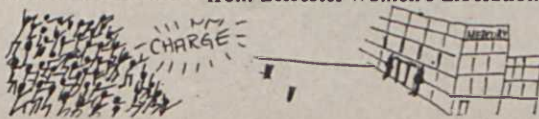
A number of immigrant organisations are organising protests against these changes in tax allowance. If you want to help contact: Commonwealth Tax Payers Association c/o Asian Centre, 229 Seven Sisters Road, London N4.



About 100 people from Leicester Gay Liberation Front and Gay News Defence Committee marched singing and chanting to the Leicester Mercury offices on January 7 to protest against the paper's attitudes towards gays. It refuses to advertise Gayline, Leicester's gay counselling telephone service, and other gay community groups like CHE and GLF.

The Gay News Defence Committee sees itself more as a national Gay Task Force or activists' alliance than specifically in defence of Gay News. It just happened to crystallise around the Gay News prosecution issue, not as a Gay News fan club. Members deplore Gay News' attitudes towards and irrelevance to women and its increasingly right-wing political tone. They've put pressure on Gay News to change.

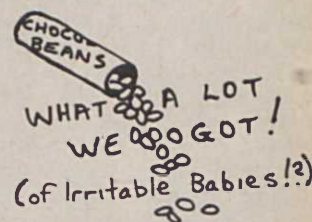
At the Mercury offices we were not allowed to distribute leaflets. The police, whose kindly feet plodded to escort us along the march, stood firmly in front of the main entrance. Fortunately they forgot the staff entrance and two demonstrators were able to spread leaflets round various rooms much to the horror of occupants who chased them out. The editor refused to comment. from Leicester Women's Liberation newsletter



* "You don't pay any attention to anything I say at home, and there is no reason to believe you would listen to anything I would say here" was a Californian judge's comment on dismissing his wife from the jurors' box... Patriarchy exposed in full splendour...

* Spain's lower house of parliament has passed a law making adultery no longer a crime. Approval in the upper house is almost certain. The archaic adultery laws were extremely sexist, and feminists had been campaigning for their repeal (see SR 54 & 60)...

* A family planning clinic for 12-20 year olds has opened in Doncaster. The clinic's policy of prescribing the pill without parental consent if this is the girl's wish, has created a bit of a hoo-ha amongst councillors, teachers and parents, their main argument being that parents of under 16-year-olds should know. Okay, but fucking will continue whether parents approve or not...



* A group of New York researchers found that chocolate eating by nursing mothers might be one of the reasons why babies are irritable, have eczema, diarrhoea or constipation...

* National Front sympathisers smashed up a gay pub in Vauxhall, London, seriously injuring a barman and one of the customers. The women's movement has always pointed out that the Front is not only racist but sexually oppressive—"men should be men (so bash out the poofa) and women should be women (so stay home and breed)"...

Camden Women's Centre moved into Rosslyn Lodge in December 1976; a spacious house, it has become a focal point for the Women's Liberation Movement in London. That's why we want the licence renewed by Camden Council to keep it going, but this is becoming a real struggle.

We need money and lots of support. So:

1 If you use the centre remember to pay 10p per visit.

2 Send anything you can. What about all the women who've had conferences at the centre and never contributed?

3 Come along to our benefit disco on March 3 at North London Poly, Prince of Wales Rd, Kentish Town. 8pm onward. Bar. Entrance 50p (claimants 40p).

Liz, Camden Women's Centre

A day in the life... at the S.S.

In *Spare Rib* 60 we asked readers to describe a day in their lives. "We want to know," we appealed, "how you cope with six kids or the Social Security office, with your job or your marriage or your multiple relationships." We also wanted to hear readers' ideas—visionary or practical—about how their lives could change. This month we publish another response.

I wake at eight-thirty after a restless night. Wednesday—my giro hasn't come 'signing on' day. The Employment Exchange and Social Security. I close my eyes again. I must get up. I have to start out early so that I get to Social Security before the queue gets too long. I don't want to spend the whole day there. I force myself out of bed, put the kettle on. I go downstairs to check the post. One letter. I make some coffee and open the letter—it's from the landlord—he is hassling me because I've applied for a fair rent. A formal letter requesting me to state a time that's convenient for him to 'inspect' my room. I climb back into bed and show the letter to Janie. 'Inspect it'. Homes aren't normally inspected unless someone's had TB or something. It's not my home. I haven't got a home. I pay eight pounds a week for this room and I try to make it feel like a home, but it's not really. I can't stand it anymore, I feel so trapped. I am trying to keep myself together to deal with the day, but I just can't and big tears well up in me. There are big sobs hurting my chest.

— I can't stand it Janie, I just can't stand it. Janie holds me and I try to sob out how alone I felt last night, but I can't really let go, I still have the urgency of having to get up and get to Social Security.

I manage to pull myself together and drink my coffee. Janie decides to come with me and we walk down to the Employment Exchange. She wants to stay with me, but I assure her that I will be alright. I queue up and 'sign on'. Then off to Social Security. It's already getting on for ten o'clock. I am later than I intended. I walk as fast as I can. What will they ask me this time? I must be strong and firm. It's my right to have this money. I mustn't let them palm me off. Maybe they'll just try to give me a few pounds to tide me over. How can they do that? I am already existing on the bare minimum—how can they possibly expect me to exist on less?

The stark, cold Social Security building looms ahead and I try to convince myself that I am within my rights to expect to get the minimum that I usually have, as I haven't actually got it. I open the door and my heart sinks—two-and-a-half of three rows of chairs are already full. I slowly make my way to the middle of the third row. I sit down and the tears well up again. I wasn't together enough, I didn't get here early enough. I've been pushing myself along the road at top speed for nothing. Slowly I resign myself to a long wait. The man next to me blows cigarette smoke at this hour of the morning. There is a sign which reads, 'Please do not smoke'. Nobody takes any notice. Do they really expect people to sit here for hours, tense and

anxious and not even smoke?

The walls are bare and painted in insipid institution yellow. The windows are high so that you can't actually see out of them. There are three reception cubicles with a wire grid which goes right up to the ceiling separating 'us' and 'them'. I have been here before, so I know where to sit. Every time someone goes to a reception booth everybody moves up one chair in a snake-like spiral. There are no instructions as to where you should sit, I suppose they just rely on the fact that there are so many people doomed to spend so much time here that there will always be someone to ensure that the system continues. Every so often a new person comes in. Some stride in confidently—they know where to go. Some make their way in hesitantly, gaze at the rows of faces and walk down to the end of the room. There is no-one to tell them where to sit or ask them if they need help. They turn round and walk back, looking lost and troubled and make their way out again. Others shuffle in already broken and take their place systematically at the end of the queue.

I look at the rows of despondent faces. I think of the people walking by outside. These three rows of people, or others like them are here every day behind these walls. Most of the outside world doesn't even know of their existence.

The room smells of tobacco smoke. Every so often someone leaves the reception area and another person takes their place. There is a flurry along all of the seats as everybody moves up one. It even gets quite exciting as there is little else to focus your attention on and there is the shared aim and purpose of getting to reception.

A young woman comes in, holding a buff-coloured envelope. She looks at the word 'RECEPTION', she looks at the three rows of people and makes her way towards reception. People start muttering. A woman shouts,

- You have to wait your turn.
 - But I only have to hand in an envelope.
 - That's all we have to do, you have to wait your turn.
 - But it won't take long—it's just a form.
- There are angry shouts of:
- You have to wait.
 - What do you think we're here for?
 - D'you think I'm waiting here for bleedin' fun?
 - Who do you think we are? We've only got forms to hand in.
 - You have to bleedin' wait.
- Puzzled and distressed, she makes her way to where people indicate that she should sit and the protests subside into mutters.

Every so often a harsh cold voice cuts into the room through the loudspeaker . . .

— Mr Tanner, Booth 9. Mr Tanner, Booth 9. This is for the people with pre-arranged interviews.

Someone else goes up to reception and there is a brief flutter as everyone moves up one. One chair nearer. There is a black man at reception. He is having trouble. His voice gets louder and everyone focuses at the new centre of attention . . .

— But you said my giro would come yesterday. It didn't come. I want it now.

— I am sorry Mr Curtis, we can't give you anything now, you will get your giro tomorrow.

— I was supposed to get it last Thursday, then Tuesday. How do I know it will come? I want it now, you fucking bastards, I need it now.

'Don't let him get away with it,' shouts a woman's voice from behind me.

This fruitless exchange goes on for some time, the black man getting more and more angry, the counter clerk standing smug and secure on the other side of the wire grid. The black man refuses to move until he gets his money. 'You can sit there all day if you want to,' says the counter clerk and moves to another booth, leaving the man helplessly sitting there.

My tears well up again. That's what's happened to me, I haven't got my giro. I can't cry here. I mustn't. I push down my tears. Look at my watch, an hour's gone by. I'm halfway down the second row of chairs.

Every so often, a door that can only be opened from the other side, flashes open. I briefly glimpse a man's head and it slams shut. I feel like I'm in another world, a surreal set in a film . . . but it's real.

Another woman tries to jump the queue. She looks pretty beaten—head down, shoulders hunched, worn-down shoes, clutching her handbag. Makes out she can't hear the protests, though they're not so vociferous this time. She stands there . . . will she make it? I feel the tension rising . . . will they let her jump the queue? . . . she sneaks in . . . everyone's muttering, but that's all . . . she's done it.

I feel confused. I feel angry that she sneaked in, it means I'll have to wait longer. On the other hand, I don't blame her for defying this ludicrous system. Maybe she had to do that, maybe when you've waited here so many times, it gets to the point where you just can't do it anymore. That one more time might just break you.

Time passes.

The black guy has given up. He can't wait there any longer. He walks away, head down, beaten. The woman he's with joins him. He is

making his way towards the door, but she hesitates. She is looking for the counter clerk that refused him his money—her money too probably. She can't even demand it in her own right. She walks back to the interview room that the clerk has transferred himself to. A few seconds later she re-appears, brandishing her umbrella. 'That'll teach him,' she says triumphantly. I wonder how on earth she managed to get at him through the narrow slit in the grid and I spend some time looking for signs of a bloody-nosed clerk.

Time passes.

First row. I get out a magazine. Try to extract some sanity from the words. I can't concentrate. The words I am reading and the stark reality of where I am jar. I put the words back in my bag. Nearly two hours have passed. Start preparing myself for more questions. Three chairs to go. Two. One. I perch nervously, my hands move restlessly. There is another person waiting to push in. I have to get there before they do. Now! I hurry forwards, pushing in front of them. Made it!

The person behind the counter has disappeared, but I am there. I clutch my piece of paper from the Employment Exchange. He re-appears and I hand it over—it says that I will have to wait seven weeks before they can give me my money—they have to check that I am not lying, that I haven't cashed it. He looks at it and seems puzzled as to why I am here.

—The Employment Exchange told me to come . . . I need some money.

He looks doubtful and then says, 'Well you'll have to be interviewed.' I can't believe it. I have waited here for two hours thinking this is it—that I am here to make a statement and get the money that is due to me. All this is to make an appointment for an interview.

—Ten-thirty tomorrow?

I hear a small voice replying, 'Yes, that's alright,' pick up my piece of paper and leave.

I feel the cold air against my face, the relief of getting out of there, despite the uselessness of it all. I just want to get back home, have some breakfast, leave all that behind me. I hurry back filled with a sense of injustice and anger. They're trying to crush me, I mustn't let them. My hopes of getting anything out of them tomorrow seem pretty meagre, but there is still a glimmer of hope.

Home again at last, my little sanctuary. I try not to think of the insecurity of that, but it haunts me. The landlord wants me out. I have the law on my side—I am a 'protected tenant', but somehow it is difficult to believe that. I have to keep telling myself that I do have rights . . . ?

by
Andrea
Webb

Changing Childcare

In Spare Rib 66 and 67 Marsha Rowe looked at collective childcare as it's been worked out in several households in Leeds, Manchester and London, and discussed the particular problems of the non-parents involved. But how do the children fare?

Collective childcare raises many doubts for the adults, about whether their day-to-day organising muddles the children, about whether relationships with the children are over-organised and don't allow for expression of feeling, and about whether their own stresses and strains of trying to live together make the children insecure.

Some of the women feel the structures they evolved for collective childcare are confusing for the children because they are so complicated, because they involve so many different people and different places. For instance, Wendy thought the Leeds creche rota* jostled children around from place to place too often, from playgroup in the morning to one house in the afternoon and another house in the evening. The creche had to operate like this because there were so many adults involved, yet she was worried that the arrangement suited the adults but not the children: "I think we did some pretty crummy things to them actually, like making them go where they didn't want to."

Children resist

Caroline thought it was unrealistic to expect the children to feel equally affectionate towards the various adults who looked after them in her collective. The children, in fact, objected to the set-up. They did not always respond whole-heartedly to each of the adults—who appeared an arbitrary lot in their eyes: "One reason why the kids were so demanding was because we made demands on them, on how and who they were to relate to. It was right that they struggled against us."

The adults may expect an equality of friendship from each other which turns out to be utopian and unrealisable, and this expectation can also lead to false relationships based on rules rather than feeling, where the children feel dissatisfied and reveal it in their behaviour. Sally felt her household had attempted a life which was out of reach, an "anarchist utopia" in which the adults aimed for highly "correct" behaviour and buried any "incorrect" emotions. The tensions this produced in the group spiralled into anxiety and guilt when inner change did not occur spontaneously out of their pattern of life: "The ideas we had were manic given our society and the conditioning we had. We were trying to impose on ourselves things that were far too difficult all at once, and it was cruel to the children in a certain kind of way. It was as cruel as anything else in society." The children showed their antipathy by resisting and not co-operating, and the adults tried to ignore their own feelings of failure. But it wasn't possible to hide the stress which came out in daily clashes: "The fights Linda and I had going to school . . . it was obvious we weren't fond of each other. She wouldn't get dressed and dragged her feet. I found her so slow and withdrawn and I knew it was the effect of the way we were living. Now I would feel very different because I would feel more able to admit to the dislike, but at the time I was struggling to do things I didn't like and doing them very badly, for the sake of the ideal, and feeling very frustrated it didn't turn out how it should be turning out."

*see 'Changing Childcare' in *Spare Rib* 66

Moving away

On the other hand, the relationships formed in collectives between adults and children can be deeply loving. Therefore, when a child is moved out of a collective household, it is not only the adults who suffer loss, it is the child, too, who misses the adults, the companionship of the other children, and the collective way of life. In some cases, adults have kept up their relationship with a child by visiting or having them to stay. The comments of a child to Alison, one of the women he used to live with, show that although he can't alter the new arrangement, he's not happy with it. She said "I see Cass about a week every month now. He seems really pleased to come here. He often says 'I wish my mother lived in Leeds' or 'I wish you lived in Lancaster'. But he understands it can't be." And Jenny described the change in her feelings now she only sees Andy every two weeks. The relationship does not retain the intensity of the previous day-to-day living together: "Quite honestly, I don't love him as much as I used to. I can't always relate to him as closely. Maybe it's because they're growing up in a way you wouldn't want them to. It's not the same."

The children in the collective miss the child who has left. Even when a child has been gone longer than a year and not visited once, the memory stays and the absent child crops up in conversation and when plans are made for special occasions like celebrating birthdays. The children often call each other brother and sister, although they have different parents.

A child who leaves a collective can also notice how the parental relationship is affected by the absence of other adults. The strain can come back on the parent and child since this is the relationship that once again has to carry most of the weight. Andy put it clearly to Jenny. He "got on better with his mum when there were other people around". Another time he phrased his regret as; "I was a silly sod. I should have stayed in your house and visited my mum."

Non-parents feel that when parents decide to leave a collective, they don't take account of the child's feelings. They query the idea that it is people without children who come and go, who are freer and less responsible about the children: "Although it is true theoretically that childless people can leave at any time and so, ultimately, the parent is responsible, in our experience it is often the parents who decide to leave the collective." And hence they are critical of parents who do not try to alleviate the emotional loss of the non-parents, or "maybe the child's, for us".

However, when Jodie did have to leave her collective for some months, her departure brought out the particular quality of the relationship between a non-parent and a child. When she first returned, James told her that "he was pleased to see me and then, six months later, we were both rejecting each other. But when I decided to put an effort into it, things gradually improved again. That seemed to be the choice." The degree of affection in the relationship corresponds to the care and attention put into it. It is not automatic.



ANGELA PHILLIPS

"You can't be offhand"

It is one of the benefits of freeing childcare from a property relationship that the quality of time the adults spend with the children is what commands the child's respect, and not the authority of ownership. Alison thought that "Kids can realise you can have several special relationships. Not just one with the parents and the others subsidiary. If kids have got two or more people around, and you're offhand with them, they can reject you because there's someone else to go to. And it's good for you to realise you can't be offhand." A child is not likely to be bribed back into a relationship. Lazy offerings of corner shop treats will not renew affection: "It's not something that can be solved by buying sweets."

There are manifold advantages for the child in this extended family situation. Home life is exciting and culturally fertile because of its variation. As Alison put it: "Penny doesn't really like reading bedtime stories, which I do. She's interested in painting and art, which I'm not. So, relating to both of us, Maya gets both. They have a choice of people to relate to so they don't get dominated by one or two personalities. They don't have to grow up in the parent's mould. They will have expectations put on them but they get more of a choice."

For the other adults who live in a collective to establish their own relationship with a child requires a certain distancing between the parent and child, although a child might be reluctant to let go of parental dependency. Here the structure for collective childcare can make it easier or more difficult. In the household which operated the creche rota, the babies born into the structure felt more comfortable than the children who were brought into it later in life. The new children were encouraged by the way the others more or less accepted the rota, and they also had a consistent pattern of adult childcare to relate to, which gave the formation of new relationships some security and stability. Wendy described a child's initial attachment to her mother: "We

knew Magda had a better time with us. Fiona didn't feed her and didn't change her nappies, yet she really wanted to be with her mother." The child's confidence developed and a year after being a "really passive" child, she had become "quite strong and tough, quite pushy actually".

Where the structure for collective childcare is loose, where there is no rota for the non-parents and no clear pattern of adult responsibility for the child to adapt to, then the child may wonder why things have half-changed and half-not-changed in this bewildering fashion and struggle to retain the familiar dependency on mother. The child can say no to a rather vague re-organisation of life by keeping the new adults at a distance and being generally disgruntled. It's an effective method of alienating the non-parents as Sally's reaction shows: "If anyone other than the mother went to do things for them, particularly for the girl, they just weren't good enough."

Caroline thought that parents were often unaware of how they guided a child into a particular pattern of possession. Parents tended to see a child in terms of 'personality', and not to see how their possessiveness moulded character and influenced the child's behaviour: "There are demands made by kids and parents on each other. Parents aren't conscious of the demands they make on kids. They just think the kid is being himself or herself." This can push the relationship of the non-parents to the children aside because the children are never free of the parental relationship, even when a non-parent and a child are face to face over something that seems to be between them alone, like the 'arena of battle' of mealtimes. This being put on the sidelines can have its advantages. For Caroline it meant she would "sometimes get kids to eat what they wouldn't with anyone else" because she was a "neutral person". But whether she persuaded a child to eat the food or not "it was a battle you always lost out on because it wasn't with you, it was with the parents." She did not try to dislodge the children's attitude to parental authority, but played along with it. To: "I like carrots at daddy's house but not at mummy's" she'd reply: "Let's pretend you're at daddy's."

An excuse for a rumpus

The problems of teaching children responsibility, independence and co-operation are heightened when the adults contradict each other. Children respond to inconsistency as if it's a golden opportunity for chasing along after their own desires. They turn adult differences in practice into an excuse for a rumpus and loudly proclaim their wants. Tim thought there was room for individual differences amongst the adults if the children did not see them as a chance for an uproar: "I don't know how important it is to have consistency anyway. There's disagreement about certain things, like drinks at night. There's actually a war going on, which I had not realised. The kids will play one adult against the other." Annie thought that children make intense efforts at persuading adults to carry out their wishes even when the adult is alone. The child searches out the adult's soft spots: "Also, spotting the parent's weaknesses, all kids do that, but it's much more concentrated when they spend a large amount of time with one adult." The "playing-off" often comes in the form of asserting parental permission for defying other adults—"Oh mummy said . . ."—which shows up how non-parents are stuck in a go-between role. Caroline found herself admiring "how inventive kids are whenever conflict arises" between adults and children, whether it's "going out in the rain in sandals, or fiddling with the knobs on the television, or going to school in your nightie."

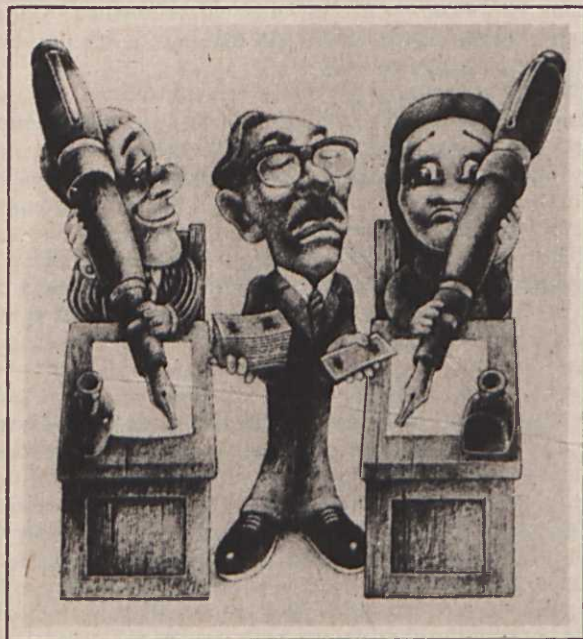
Jodie's household found a solution for mealtimes: "We decided that whoever cooked the meal should say whether the child should finish it or not, and we have stuck to that." Originally it was the problem of parental control; "It used to be that you cooked a meal and the parents would say whether they could leave it" but now parents and non-parents act together. They simply have a mass walkout, leaving the adult in charge alone with the children: "If there is any conflict other adults try to go out of the room because the kids just try to play them off against each other."

Meal times bring everyone in a house together and revolve around the children. To save double preparation of food and to enable adults and children to eat together, meals are usually served early and adult individual habits often subsumed. Fran found that: "I had to change my eating habits drastically when I moved in because we eat between 5 and 6pm and the food we eat has got to be food the kids will eat or it's two separate meals." There might be blatant inequality between adults and children, as in Caroline's household where the children insisted on meat because they ate meat at their father's house, while the adults were not allowed meat: "The kids were very spoiled. It was a way of getting at their mum really."

Tim happily discovered that a basic principle in encouraging children to eat was to make the food appear appetising; "What food looks like is important. I know if I cook things and they come out a funny colour, the kids won't eat it. Last night I cooked eggs and mushrooms and when they went grey I knew the kids wouldn't eat it. The adults don't think about it. A kid might not like cauliflower." In other collectives children had to learn to accept the variety of the adults' attitudes to food. Alison described this as symbolic in a child's upbringing. A pernickety personality gets short shrift because the children "become more adaptable, eating different food, they grow up to be less rigid, less frightened of the unknown."

There are other conflicts within collectives about approaches to childcare. A child's vitality and health would be of equal concern to all, but ideas on health care might vary, as in one household where there is an amicable agreement-to-disagree between two of the non-parents, Hugo and Alison: "Maya always gets trouble with her chest. She gets lots of colds. I really believe in naturopath foods and herbs. I think it has to do with a healthy diet, although a lot of people would take her straight to the doctor who would treat the symptoms and not the cause. And he believes the answer is to pile on more clothes. We have talked about it, but it's just difficult to resolve."

The TASS Guide to What They Say. Number One.



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you're doing
broadly the same
work as him.
I don't!"**

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Clothes and class values

Sometimes there are underlying political or class differences between parents and non-parents which non-parents translate into a reluctance to carry out certain tasks, like preparing children for school. Sally did not agree with the decision to send Linda to a free school: "It creates a different sort of privilege. I don't agree with schools that are run outside the system because that means you are unable to fight the system." Fran disagreed with Louise's ideas about the children's dress, which conformed to "traditional working class respectable" standards of the area where they live. Louise disapproved of odd socks, which Fran thought were invisible underneath dungarees. "I don't get them up in the morning partly because I don't like it, and partly because there are always hassles about what clothes they wear."

Alison, however, sees a child's appearance as being relevant to relationships with other children, as well as to class values. In her area: "Because most people are really poor and black and unemployed they feel they have to keep their standards up or they'd be accused of neglecting their kids." So it would be a middle class indulgence and an insult if the children she looks after were "allowed to wear what they want". The child will be "put down by other kids" and "by the time they learn by experience it can be too late". Tim emphasised this too, when he talked about how his household went to some trouble to buy a set of clothes which fitted the seven-year-old who lived with them. There was a gypsy encampment next to the child's school, and since he mostly wore castoffs, the other children had taunted him, calling him a gypsy.

In the outside world, there are always particular problems collective children face. At school they come up against ideology in the classroom. One child answered an exercise in counting practice by totalling the number of people in his house as six and then had to explain himself to the teacher because his answer did not fit the usual categories: "The teacher asked him to qualify it because he'd answered brother, no, sister, no. He'd put all of us." And when non-parents go to school in place of parents the children are sometimes at a loss to know what to do: "Rose did this sponsored walk around the playground and they were all mummies there. When it was over she came up to me and said there were cups of tea going, but not for you, Jodie, 'cos you're not my mummy". The children are often questioned about the mysterious collection of people who rotate as parents in their lives; "One of the other kids asked Peter about me when I was collecting him from school—'If she's not your auntie and she's not your grannie, who is she?' Peter said 'she's my friend'." This affection is endearing but does not really satisfy the children's bewilderment: "People asking 'who's that?' and the kid not knowing what to say".

Freedom from stereotyping

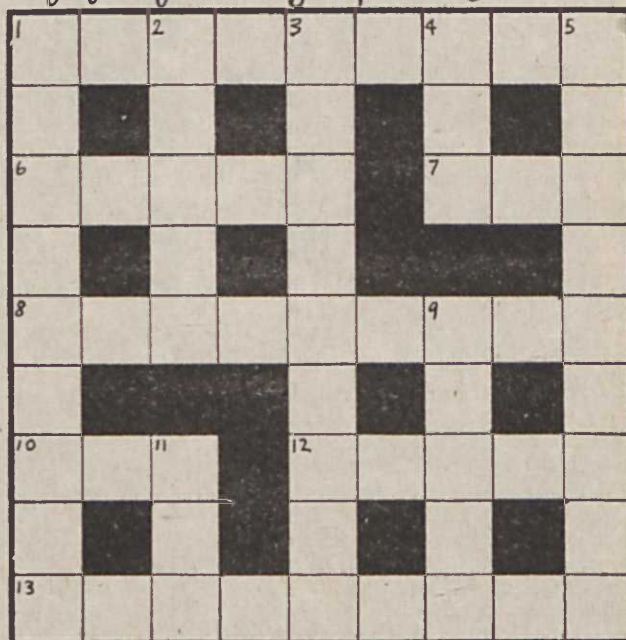
So there are problems of identity in this wider structure, but there can also be freedom from stereotyping. The adults who are not the parents see a child's personality afresh. Their view presents a new perspective to the parents, and this naivete and sincerity can question parental stereotyping of a child's character, as with Fran: "I found myself shouting at Christine because that was the expected relationship to her. Louise's attitude is that Christine is so naughty that you have to shout at her. But from Christine's point of view... she has to be naughty to get attention." The child may be hesitant, stubborn and cry wolf, but will respond to a non-parent's attentiveness: "If Christine cries with me I get really worried about it, even if I think she's just putting it on, and I ask her what's the matter. Christine does put on a lot of things. It's only when she's really upset she'll tell you about it."

Alison showed how stereotyping can fall away as a result of a simple, sensible suggestion: "A lot of things people just don't realise they're doing. Like keeping the kids up too late so they are not getting enough sleep and are always tired, then you just think that's how they are." It implies that criticism is necessary because collective childcare is as much a process of adult self-education as it is of teaching children, and she listed a string of common faults of parents and non-parents alike which were sometimes discussed: "People vary about whether they are reluc-

tant to say things, like possibly being very authoritarian, or not talking to the kids as people, seeing them as objects who can't understand, or being over-protective and over-fussy as well."

Mutual enjoyment of each other's company is one of the pleasures of collective childcare. If a parent is tired and weary, there is always someone else "to be lively with the child". The non-biological parents, in return, discover a delight in letting adulthood fly out the window, in playing the fool, in relaxing: "You can get things from kids you can't get from adults. You can be more stupid, you can play daft games and knock about." Being the entertainer, entrancing each other with games: "Rose plays endless word games, and everything begins with 'p', or she pretends she's lost her voice and carries on all through tea pretending to be something." Remembering what you thought of adults who were always earnest, worried and busy; "Adults are very stuffy. I don't see myself as stuffy but I'm sure the children do, or a kill-joy, or whatever. and it doesn't matter how fair or liberal you are, you're still stuffy." Embarrassment and self-consciousness have to go—"adults are really screwed up about playing. I know I was and still am"—as you "actually make a fool of yourself and play with the kids"—as you forget about "whether any adult will judge me" and show your happiness and silliness, "and that's acknowledging you are getting something out of it as well."●

If you get any Spare Time...



ACROSS

1. In mess, fit to change for you, sisters (9)
6. Farmers vehicle loses alternative to produce piece of land (5)
7. Can they defeat S.P.U.C. (1,1,1)
8. Quart ale and point towards what we want for the job (5,4)
10. Air for the Republicans (1,1,1)
12. Help Ulster initially returned to build country in Asia (5)
13. Becoming gloomy at sign of old age approaching (5,4)

DOWN

1. Big fish loses right to take responsibility for offspring; doesn't get as much attention as what mother does (9)
2. Feline protest (5)
3. Nell got in without giving anything away (2,7)
4. Favoured child sounds like heavenly body (3)
5. Bird or wife in the office (9)
9. Mathematical snake (5)
11. I'm a french friend (3)

Sent in by Sue Ryrie

ANSWERS

ACROSS: 1. FEMINISTS; 6. TRACT; 7. N.A.C.; 8. EQUAL RATE; 10. I.R.A.; 12. INDIA; 13. GOING GREY.
DOWN: 1. FATHERING; 2. MIAOU; 3. NO TELLING; 4. SON; 5. SECRETARY; 9. ADDER; 11. AMI

Hairdressing Juniors

THE BALD FACTS

The glamorous 'showbiz' image of hairdressing so shamelessly exploited by films like 'Shampoo' and overblown personalities like Vidal Sassoon has little or nothing to do with the working life of most hairdressers.

Britain's 135,000 hairdressing workers, of whom almost 90 per cent are women, are the lowest paid employees in this country. This bleak fact is recorded in the Low Pay Unit's most recent report 'Short Back and Sides for the Poor', published last December. In 1977 the average wage of qualified women hairdressers over 18 was £29.80—around two thirds of the average female wage.

The report stated that the Hairdressing Wages Council, responsible for setting minimum wages in the industry, has the worst record of all Wages Councils. When the Council met in December to award increases for the next twelve months, the previous agreement had run out five months before. New minimum wage rates, approved at that meeting, gave a £4.50 flat increase to all workers over 18 years old and £2.50 to apprentices.

It's inevitable that the one apprenticeship that does attract girls—in their thousands—remunerates them so badly. Of the miserable five per cent of girls who are apprenticed on leaving school, over 80 per cent choose to become hairdressers and manicurists—but unlike other apprenticeships, the reward for years of training is pitiful. As one hairdresser who contacted the Low Pay Unit said "I had to train for three years on just £5 per week, and I am still not earning as much as most unskilled workers."

Apprentices are often treated little better than skivvies during their three year apprenticeship. Indeed, many of them never reach the end. The less scrupulous employers are known to find pretexts for sacking them before they get qualifications, often leaving them with nothing to compensate for three years slave labour and their employers free to recruit new slaves.

The problem here lies with the lack of structure in the industry. Unlike almost every other country, Britain has no compulsory training for hairdressers. Furthermore anyone with a few fancy ideas about perming and some initial capital can set themselves up as a hairdresser—and employ staff.

The Hairdressing Council has for some time been calling for compulsory registration of hairdressers. This demand was taken up in January by Labour MP Stephen Ross who plans to bring in a Bill that would require all aspiring hairdressers to take approved examinations and to register with the Hairdressing Council. Anyone opening a salon, employing staff or apprentices, would also have to possess the Diploma of the Master Craftsman (sic).



ANGELA PHILLIPS

But at the moment training for young hairdressers as opposed to apprentices in other industries is entirely at the whim of the employer. Shaney, aged 18, is a second-year day release student at the London College of Fashion. Her employer allows her to attend college—on her one day off. "My employer doesn't train me. He thinks that because he's sending me to college, that's his bit done." She finds it hard to learn much in the salon. "You stand there and try to watch the stylists, which is the only way to learn, and they come up to you and say, can you shampoo Mrs So-and-So. Apprentices seem to be there just to clear up, sweep the hair off the floor and do the shampooing."

Few apprentices are under any illusion about the nature of their training. The hours are often long, conditions far from ideal and the work itself is physically arduous. Barney Lewis, Chairman of the Hairdressing Apprenticeship Council, says he sees teenage girls with old ladies' hands

from shampooing all day. "We tell them to try and wear gloves, but of course the clients don't like that."

The drop-out and turnover rate in the industry are high, and those who stick to it use phrases like "you've got to have commitment" and "you wouldn't do it for the money" when asked about their jobs. Rose, who's worked for 45 years in London salons, has seen many young girls come and go. "There's no glamour in it—there are too many varicose veins in it for that. A lot of the girls who went into it when it seemed a swinging profession have left."

Indeed, hairdressing has all the hallmarks of typical women's work with its caring, badly paid, unorganised workforce, scattered in thousands of tiny corner-shop salons.

Few hairdressers belong to a union. Instead they must rely for protection on the Wages Inspectors, who act as the Government's watchdog, albeit a fairly dozy one, on behalf of employees in Wages Councils. It is their job to check that

HOUSTON CONVENTION

Last November 18,000 delegates attended the National Women's Conference at Houston, Texas, called by Congress to ratify a National Plan of Action against "barriers that prevent women from participating fully and equally in national life". For many liberal feminists, the conference was a triumph: "Houston was a rite of passage", president of the National Organisation for Women; "I found I didn't have to be a radical to be a feminist", delegate from Maine. Feminism had entered the mainstream.

Yet, for some, the conference was not moderate enough. About 20% of the delegates were "pro-family" conservatives opposed to abortion, lesbian rights and even the congressional Equal Rights Amendment (see SR 64). They also opposed calls for increased government spending on women's health and training, refuges and childcare, preferring to rely on "personal initiative" and the private sector. Congress and President Carter, a known "fiscal moderate", may well agree. All the same, the feminist proposals got voted through.

For women who saw their feminism as more radical, the conference posed a different problem: was the movement being watered down for government approval? Leah Fritz a writer from New York, sent us her Houston diary. For us, her account raised some questions and political differences—but we liked its vivid picture of American feminism.

November 17

Any gathering of women functions on many levels. There is the one shown to the world, which means the world of men. On this level, women will try to adapt themselves to parliamentary procedure, a mechanism devised to ensure orderly behavior among men whose interests are perhaps violently dissimilar. It will be some time, if ever, before women learn that such a form is antithetical to their needs and purposes.

Here I am, trying to write an article in the journalistic form of men's newspapers, a form I know well, having been trained to it, but I find myself instead going under the skin of these rituals and feeling for what will not be expressed in the male press, but what surely needs to be expressed.

November 18

I have been wondering why Houston was chosen for this conference. The male hostility is palpable here. It is clearly Marlboro country with, I am told, the highest percentage of rapes in America.

My motel room is on the ground floor, and the glass wall which is also my door seems to offer little protection. The bellhop told me to be sure to chain it last night, and I drew the curtain and slept with airconditioning although it was no more than 50 degrees outside. All the windows were locked. I pushed a chair up against the door.

After a breakfast which included an unasked-for bowl of hominy grits—a friendly, regional touch—I went for registration downstairs.

A huge Equal Rights Amendment sign in front of the City Hall made me, at first, confuse that building with convention headquarters. There were Houston women selling buttons saying, "Seneca Falls, 1848—Houston, 1977" (Seneca Falls was

the first Women's Rights Convention), and they were visibly proud. The sale of the buttons will help pay for a women's center here—rape crisis center, battered women refuge—the works. It can't be easy for feminists where "men are men", and reflecting the prevailing macho mood in this city, the Houston lesbian group calls itself the "Lesberadoes".

The Houston women on the steps of City Hall seem more gutsy than the "leaders" from the North. I have a growing feeling that all the dissident groups have been manipulated somehow, the edges smoothed by some very efficient organisers determined to keep the tone "liberal", non-controversial.

I was certain of very little here in Houston—of why this conference was called, of who hoped to profit from it, and in what way. This could be a leadership sell-out to Jimmy Carter, the born-again Baptist who had a moral conviction that the rich should continue to get richer, and the poor should continue to get babies. Why—oh, why—Houston? Why not Washington, D.C., sleeping in black churches the way we used to on peace demonstrations, instead of in these creepy motels scattered across a hostile landscape? Why is this called the National Women's Conference instead of the National Women's Liberation Conference like the one in London I attended last spring? If we are not here as feminists, why are we here at all? Why the PR atmosphere in America, the men in attendance, the slickness of everything?

The Hyatt-Regency Hotel is an oilman's wet dream. The glass-caged elevators rise like gushers from the lobby for all to see, but smart women use the stairs, because it isn't fun to get stuck in a glass cage and look ten floors down at a brick floor.

A thousand women sat on that brick floor for eight hours guarding their suit-

the statutory minimum rate is being paid to hairdressers. Yet recent 'spot' checks by the Inspectors have revealed that more than one employer in five was illegally underpaying staff.

Some limited headway has been made by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) to unionise hairdressers, but the numbers are still small: unions are a dirty word for most salons. USDAW's main successes have been in the hairdressing departments of big stores. When the hairdressers and beauticians at Harvey Nicholls, in London's Knightsbridge, joined USDAW, their salaries were increased within three months by between £8-£12 a week, and "conditions became better than we'd ever contemplated in the past".

Hairdressers as a group do not even have trade union representation on their own Wages Council. More than five years ago USDAW withdrew from it, feeling unable to be a party to low wage rates and an inequitable wages structure. This decision is strongly criticised in the Low Pay Unit's report, which accuses USDAW of abandoning its responsibilities to hairdressers.

Hairdressing is one of the very few skilled, craft jobs attracting women. For those lucky enough to get proper training, it provides an escape from the monotony of most 'women's' jobs. It is high time the industry recognised hairdressing skill by providing adequate pay and controlled training structures. This report underlines yet again the inadequacy of equal pay legislation in dealing with more than a tiny proportion of women's jobs. Hairdressing is yet another 'ghetto industry' untouched by the law. ●

Polly Patullo

Short Back And Sides For The Poor by Ceri Thomas, available from the Low Pay Unit, 9 Poland St, London W1 for 50p + postage. Their latest publication **The Charge Of The Wages Brigade** assesses the enforcement of minimum wages in hairdressing, retailing and catering (50p + postage).

**JAZZ 'N' JUMP
WITH SPARE RIB
MOONSPIRIT
& THE RESISTANCE**

for more details, see p.5

cases while the hotel tried to dislodge a male convention which (deliberately?) overstayed its booking—but I didn't understand this at the time, accepted it as just one of many bewildering bureaucratic rituals. I passed the squatters by and went up to a party on the third floor. It was just ending, and we were given buttons and leaflets from Coyote, the prostitutes' union, and suddenly I felt at home. Pinning the button to my bosom, I knew that the red death of our revolution had slipped into this prince's fortress. Coretta King was speaking, and I remembered a snowy day ten years ago in Washington when a peace demonstration turned into the first feminist caucus.

When King stepped down, the cleaners came in to sweep us away for a NOW meeting, but Kate Millett took the microphone and eloquently complained (reminding us that the personal was still political) of the treatment of the delegates waiting in the lobby for their rooms.

I asked a delegate what she wanted to do about this unconscionable delay. She turned to me suspiciously and asked, "Do you want us to start breaking windows?"

I must explain that here in Houston I and my sisters were regarded as pushy New York hippy communist lesbian Jews. I must explain that the word "New York" was synonymous with all those adjectives. I began to feel a cold white antisemitism crossing even the sex barrier . . .

There is a dramatisation of the Brussels Tribunal of Crimes Against Women tonight. The audience is clearly made up (one *can* tell by their dress) of radical feminists. It is a moving performance, but, I feel, a side-show for the committed; presented outside of where the masses are assembled, away from the television cameras.

There is something for everyone in Houston. Tomorrow at the plenary session we will be treated to Rosalyn Carter, Betty Ford, and Lady Bird Johnson.

And where, oh where, is Patricia Nixon?

This is not London, where the Queen had the grace to stay away, so the women could have their revolution decently, make and experience the struggle.

This is America, and the victory must be quick so the coffin can be sealed.

November 19

Not for anything would I attend the morning plenary session with the three first ladies and the others who were never feminists but now sit under a blue and white banner with the word "WOMEN" on it. I watch Rosalyn Carter on the color television set in my motel room. She is making a campaign speech for Jimmy. Betty Ford looks ill, and Bella Abzug, the feminist congresswoman, looks bad too at first, but soon she warms up to her speech which has the flavor of the New Deal. It gets too radical for Houston TV, so they cut her off twice while the announcer cozily chats with a woman newscaster. We all have credentials for the after-



1977: Three First Ladies on the Houston platform—Rosalyn Carter, Betty Ford, Lady Bird Johnson

noon session now; press badges, labelled "Media", which causes somebody to ask me, seriously, if I sing or dance. I have a plain white "observer" badge which I had bought for the five dollar entrance fee, along with the packet of convention literature.

We are learning how to follow orders and become more and more powerless. The male media are down on the campaign floor because they have bigger audiences. When the women's movement began, we refused to speak to male members of the press, which caused the big newspapers to hire women reporters. If we barred male television crews, I feel, that might force new job openings for women now.

I moved to the New York delegation and there ran into a woman I knew. She has an exterminating business, and the last time I saw her she was in hot pursuit of the roaches that infest our house. She is a radical lesbian who sometimes chides me gently for not being one. I ask her what she thinks of the way the conference is rigged. Although there has been a heavy emphasis from the dais on the glories of the homemaker and mother and almost total silence about the lesbian issue, my militant sister, suddenly adopting the poker face of a dignitary being interviewed by the press, asks, coyly, "What do you mean, 'rigged'?"

So I tell her the bugs are back, and walk away.

I stand there trying to listen, when a young conference attendant in a red IWY t-shirt, blond and cool as an airline hostess, approaches to read my yellow card and tell me my time on the floor is up. I turn in my badge and go to the Battered Wives workshop.

Five or six women posing as experts (one is a Senator's secretary) take turns lecturing about a new Bill before Congress which will provide funds for Battered Wives' Shelters.

After keeping my hand up until it is numb, I am at last recognised, and ask if most of the funds this Bill will make available are to be distributed by groups like the Mental Health Association which subscribes to the theory that women *like* being beaten. I also mention that English women have set up shelters of their own, 75 of them, in abandoned houses and the like, without professional aid and with

considerable success.

The lecturer denies that MHA will be running things (they are already setting up shelters in Westchester), but comments, "Everybody needs a little therapy." I say, "Yes. Men who beat women." There is a stony silence.

Now I will back-track a little. In the convention hall there was an incident earlier which greatly unnerved me. At the end of what she evidently thought to be a rousing speech for ERA, Jill Ruckelshaus told everybody to rise and hold her neighbour's hand. I was tired of doing what people told me to do, so I moved away to "observe". Everybody, by God, stood up and held hands! Then she said, "Repeat after me . . ." and began to recite a pledge not unlike the Pledge of Allegiance, dedicating women to the support of ERA and America. Throughout the room, women repeated this inane pledge word-for-word, and then jumped up and down like so many cheerleaders, shouting "E!!!!R!!!!A!!!!"

I began to smell a very nasty red herring. All the tight discipline of all the delegations was based on fear of "the Right". And so even deeply committed feminists—like me!—were submitting, at a so-called women's conference, to the most controlled conformity.

I left the hall and wept.

Feminism had been such a different vision for me.

The movement, as far as I could see, was doing just fine without government interference. It's true ERA was in doubt and forces against abortion reform were increasingly successful at chipping away at our advances. But the movement itself, the movement as a process of reaching out across the world, shaking ever-increasing numbers of women into consciousness, was doing just fine. As important as temporal reforms are, it seemed to me that the movement itself—that surging hope for autonomy which had spread across the globe—might be lost here in Houston.

It was we, through our consciousness-raising meetings, our speakouts, our books and small publications, who had drawn attention to women's needs—we who had made the demands, our growth had shaken the establishment. Why this convention? Why are all those women attempting to

VOICES ON THE RIGHT

Outside, at a 'pro-family' counter-rally in the Houston Astrobball, Clay Smothers of Texas: "I ask for victory over perverts of this country. I want a right to segregate my family from these misfits and perverts."



1970: *Mad* magazine's view of Betty Friedan, founder of the National Organisation for Women

lead us when we have been so careful, these past ten years, to cultivate the sense of power in each of us, in each woman, by refusing any leadership except that which comes from within?

This evening, near exhaustion, I dropped in on a group who said they were dissidents and wanted help to organise a press conference. They turned out to be a left-feminist group. The style was familiar—the tortuous intellectual debates over morality and strategy. In the past I had found such discussions tedious. But weary as I was, it felt good to hear real arguments again. I couldn't participate in their way, but I felt that here, at last, I could tell of my deep sadness at what I had seen and heard. And their response, too, was from the heart. It felt like feminism. I was talking about the rape of my dream, and they heard me.

At this convention, my convention, the rules were too conservative to reject an all-white Mississippi delegation which included four male members of the Nazi party. That put it somewhat behind the Republican and Democratic conventions of recent memory.

I will not go back for more. I will leave Houston tomorrow for those eastern cities that still allow me—pushy Jewish articulate aging bourgeois woman that I am—to walk the earth with consciousness, if not yet with pride.

November 20

This change is too sudden for art, but in life, as in fairy tales, such things happen.

In the morning, a friend popped around to tell me something astounding had happened the night before. All hell had broken loose on the floor over ERA, with parliamentary procedure falling apart, people grabbing microphones and making unauthorized speeches... and the ERA won—*resoundingly*—and women literally danced in the aisles! She said she didn't think I should go home just yet.

This was to be a day of strange joy. When we returned to the conference, everybody we met told us something wonderful had just happened. The minority group women had caucused together the night before and united to write a new and radical statement of their de-

mands, and when the moderate proposal the commission had offered came up, it was voted down, with the substitution carrying overwhelmingly! The jubilation had been thunderous.

And from then on out, it was radical feminism all the way. I watched in amazement the abortion plank almost *glide* in. The Right was outnumbered and outmaneuvered, and while they put up a struggle, at each succeeding radical vote, they seemed to shrink more and more into themselves. Their speeches became less militant, almost apologetic.

Excitement mounted as we approached the vote for freedom of sexual preference. Balloons appeared on all sides of the gallery with the inscription, "We are everywhere." I tied my balloon to my wrist as I had as a child. There were speakers on both sides, those against it expressing a pious belief that lesbians did, indeed, have a right to sexual freedom, but—. One of them said she was afraid that ratifying such a plank would harm the chances of the ERA amendment, and another said that it was all right to be a lesbian so long as you weren't too obvious about it.

And then Betty Friedan spoke (*author of The Feminine Mystique way back in 1965, founder of NOW, and a longtime opponent of lesbian militancy*). She said that, raised in a middle class family in middle America, she had always had trouble with the lesbian issue. She said she had perhaps loved men too well. She said that she had learned a lot recently and now, knowing that ERA had no provisions for lesbian freedom, she must support, and urge others to support, the plank on sexual preference. The leader, to paraphrase Gandhi, had caught up with her people.

Then a woman rose to speak on a point of personal privilege. She charged that a gentleman of the press had punched her and called her a bitch.

When the chair ignored her complaint, another woman rose to insist that the chair demand an apology or have the man thrown out.

The chair said she couldn't respond because she didn't know what had happened.

The chair had not yet learned that

women respect the word of a sister when she says she has been assaulted—that the burden of doubt is on the man. As in rape.

Bella Abzug took the microphone to request an apology.

And then the deliberations were over for the day. The press invited all the women to a party, to burn our temporary floor passes!

About a dozen of us went out to dinner to a Mexican restaurant in a working-class part of town. We knew it was working-class because an old peace sign was painted on a stucco wall. Our taxi-driver warned us it was a *bad* neighborhood.

We felt comfortable here, away from the big hotels and the terrible convention halls. The mood we were in, even the stares of the men had no power to disturb us.

I proposed a toast. I was thinking, even though, this victory might prove illusory, it was good to enjoy it. So I offered, "to false victories!" But that was too much of a down for this jolly company.

Another woman said she wanted to offer a "substitute proposal". We all laughed. She said, "To the old dialectic!" But that was too cerebral for this jolly company.

So another woman proposed, "To the good feelings in all of us!"

And that was fine.

November 21

What I had felt at the beginning of the conference about the assumptions of the leaders—that they had sewed up the delegations for the moderate and highly compromising, in some instances, Plan of Action—was apparently well-understood by the delegates themselves, at least by the end of the conference. They felt, as I did, that the whole thing was an attempt by the government to buy the women's movement for five million dollars.

Abzug and her cohorts tried every trick known to politicians to ram through the final vote for a cabinet level Women's Department, passage of which would certainly have put the movement in Carter's hands. The conference was scheduled to close at 12.30, and an hour and a half of the time was spent on the kind of speeches that marked the opening plenary session. A fifteen-year-old member of an organisation called "Future Homemakers of America" was a star of the festivities. At last, the conference insisted on following the agenda, and in the end the Women's Department was defeated. Although there is one scheduled for next year, I suspect we will not see another National Women's Conference under the auspices of the government for many years to come. The feminist struggle, as a radical protest movement, lives.

As the signs of the Latinas proclaimed, *Viva la Mujer!* ●

This is a shortened version of Leah Fritz's journal, which was too long for us to print in full.

In the street, lone man with a banner: "IWY means Immoral Women's Year".

Inside, conference delegate Velma Price of Nebraska: "Wake up America, to the forces at work to destroy your family life, the private enterprise system and everything you hold dear as Christians."

SHORT LIST

INFORMATION TO ANNY BRACKX

27 CLERKENWELL CLOSE

LONDON EC1

TALKS AND CONFERENCES

Women & Kaiso
24 February. 7.30 at the Women's Research & Resources Centre (WRRC), 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1 (01-253 7563). Discussion with Lynne Hutchinson about the sexist nature of Trinidadian Calypso.

Women's Waged Labour
25 February. 2.00-4.30 socialist feminist educational at St Ann's Hall, Venn St, London SW4. Discussion with Veronica Beechey of her article in *Capital & Class*. Creche. Details from 01-720 7316.

What is Male Supremacy?
25/26 February. London region revolutionary feminist conference at Carlton Community Centre, Granville Rd, London NW6. Discussion topics: reproduction, sex language and biology, woman's power, processes of revolution, pornography, sexuality—power and love, consciousness raising, the future... Sat evening bop. Creche. Bring food. Adm £2.50 (£1.50 unwaged). Papers (sae) and registration: 185 Alsborough Rd, Seven Kings, Essex. Women only.

Women in Manual Trades
25/26 February. Conference in Sheffield open to any women either working in a manual trade or interested in taking up such a trade. Details from 0742-21880.

Women Writers Conference
25/26 February. The Women's Arts Alliance, Cambridge Terrace Mews, off Chester Gate, London NW1. Workshops on poetry, fiction, journal writing, specific themes like sexuality, feminist criticism, and readings. Contact the WAA with ideas and for details (01-935 1841).

Women in Struggle
27 February—18 March. A series of events at the Women's Arts Alliance as above. The Poster-Film Collective in conjunction with women from Malaysia, Ethiopia, Chile etc will present through film, slide shows, posters and discussions a historical and international view of their struggle for liberation. Details from the Poster-Film Collective, 307 Euston Rd, London NW1 (01-388 0182).

* Indicates publications are available from the Publication Distribution Co-op, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.

Working Women in the Old Caledonian Market over the Last 50 Years
3 March. 7.30 Feminist History Group talk at the WRRC, as above, by Mary Kennedy. Women only.

The Political Economy of Housework
4 March. 2.00-4.30 socialist feminist educational as above.

Why are Women Oppressed?
8 March. 7.00 Symposium at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London W1. Speakers Evelyn Reed, Irene Brennan and Hermione Harris. Details from C Harris (01-261 1354).

The Re-entry of Women into the Labour Market
10 March. 7.30 at the WRRC as above. Speakers Julia Brannen (Surrey Univ).

Women's Devolution
11 March. 1.30 discussion in Edinburgh on violence against women, rape and battering (see news shorts).

Action against Sexism in Education
11 March. Day conference at Abraham Moss Centre, Manchester. Organised by the Women in Education Collective. Details from Pauline Hales, 4 Cliffdale Drive, Crumpsall, Manchester 8.

Women and the Law
11 March. 10.30-5.30 WEA conference at the YWCA, Gt Russell St, London WC1. Talks and discussion on women's rights, state legislation, the practical application of the Acts and the underlying weaknesses of government policy. Speakers Tess Gill and Jean Coussins. Creche 25p per child. Adm £1. Details from Lucy Mannheim, WEA, 32 Tavistock Sq, London WC1 (01-387 8966).

Bisexuality and the Women's Movement
11 March. 1.00 planning meeting for a conference, at the Camden Women's Centre, Rosslyn Lodge, Lyndhurst Rd, London NW3. Papers and ideas are welcomed. Suggestions for workshops so far: what is bisexuality, bisexuality feminism and socialism, monogamy and bisexuality, sex with women, and with men, political alignment with lesbians. Details from Bi-

sexuality Planning Group, c/o Camden Women's Centre.

Racism and Fascism
11 March. 10.00 Midlands Regional socialist feminist conference at Birmingham University. Details from Lucy Bland, CCCS, Birmingham University B15.

Women Against Racism and Fascism
12 March. National meeting in Birmingham for all WARF groups/individuals, on strategy. Details from Lucy Bland as above.

Women and the Welfare State
18 March. 10.30-4.30 socialist feminist educational as above. Panel discussion and workshops structured around *Women and the Welfare State* (by Elizabeth Wilson).

Women and Writing
18 March. 2.00-6.30 at the Royal Commonwealth Society, 18 Northumberland Ave, London WC2. Women in Media symposium with critics, editors, producers as well as writers participating. Adm £4 incl refreshments. Details from Pat Barr (01-852 5228).

Midlands Women's Liberation Conference
18/19 March. In Shrewsbury. Workshops, films, disco and band Sister Gin. Creche. Food. Inform the organisers if you're going: Sue (Cross Houses 418) or Trudy (Ellesmere 2726).

Asian Women in Britain
28 March. 6.30 discussion at the Institute of Race Relations, 247/249 Pentonville Rd, London N1 (01-837 0041), led by Amrit Wilson.

The Sociology of Culture
1-4 April. British Sociological Association conference at Sussex University, including feminist sessions and events. Booking closes on 10 March. Details from the BSA, 13 Endsleigh St, London WC1 or from Michele Barrett (01-800 8367).

Women's Liberation National Conference
7-9 April. At Ladywood School, Birmingham. Proposed structure: no skills workshops; women should be allocated to the same workshop for the whole conference; workshops should be vaguely on the same theme, falling under three headings—how do we oppress each other, how can we campaign against the oppression of women within society, how do we come together; there should be a separate meeting on Fri night for women new to the movement, and a space for women feeling overwhelmed; only one plenary on Sun afternoon; advance registration and circulation of papers encouraged; different groups/regions should volunteer to do chores; creches organised on a regional basis; reduced conference fee for non-earners, and subsidised fares for women living far

from Birmingham. Contact the Birmingham Women's Centre for latest details of registration fees, pooled fare arrangements, papers etc.

Do you want to perform music, theatre, dance or poetry? Do you have crafts, books to sell? Have you made a film you want to show? Got any practical ideas for a fare-pool? Write as soon as possible to the organisers: Caroline and Sandy c/o Women's Centre, 76 Brighton Rd, Balsall Heath, Birmingham B12.

CAMPAIGNS

International Women's Day
4 March. Today women all over Europe will be celebrating. Look in your local women's newsletters or phone Wires (0904-35471) for activities in your area. In London assemble 2.00 at Clapham Common tube, march to St Matthews Meeting Place in Brixton (opposite Town Hall). Food and entertainment provided into the evening; creche from 1.00. No banners, leaflets or tee-shirts that contravene the six demands of the women's liberation movement, or that advertise groups whose primary aim is not women's liberation. Women only.

Lesbians' Babies Mothers' Rights Fund. "In view of the recent uproar resulting from disclosures printed in the *Evening News* regarding the availability of Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID) for lesbians (SR 67), we are appealing for donations to go towards the legal costs incurred by the lesbian family who had to issue two injunctions against the *Evening News*' printing the article." Send donations to Mothers' Rights Fund, c/o Sappho, Basement, 20 Dorset Sq, London NW1.

23 February. 10.00 demonstration at Mansion House Magistrates Court in support of the woman who was arrested ('criminal damage') after spraypainting a couple of *Evening News* vans expressing her anger.

International Women's Day Events
4 March. Watch your local women's newsletters, or ring Wires (0904 34571).

Save Plaistow Maternity Hospital
18 March. March organised by the Action Cttee assembling 12.30 at the hospital, Howards Rd, London E13. The closure date is drawing nearer, so come out and support the work-in.

Defend Gay News
After the successful prosecution of *Gay News* for 'blasphemous libel' the National Gay News Defence Cttee was formed to protest against the verdict, as well as to campaign for the repeal of the blasphemy legislation. Organisations/individuals can affiliate or participate in NGNDC meetings.

Contact Ann Wilson, 146 Mayall Rd, London SE24.

Centres

Rape Crisis

"The Rape Crisis Centre would like to hear from other women who are interested in setting up crisis centres in their areas. We are anxious to give other groups as much support as we can and to share our experiences with them." They are also organising a rape-counselling training weekend in the beginning of March in Nottingham. If you're interested contact the centre, PO Box 42, London N6 or (01-340 6913).

Oaklands

Oaklands Women's Centre, the only residential women's centre in Britain, is in debt—they have to pay back a loan by March. So all those who have enjoyed staying there and want it to continue dig in your pockets... Donations and bookings (£1.50 per head for bed and full board) to Oaklands Women's Centre, Glasbury, via Hereford, Powys (Glasbury 275).

Funk and Music

Spare Rib Bop

24 February. 8.00-11.45 at North London Poly, Ladbroke House, Highbury Grove, N5. Bar, Moonspirit, The Resistance and a disco. Adm £1 (60p unwaged). Mixed.

Women's Music Workshops

Every alternate Fri 8.00 at the Women's Arts Alliance, as above.
24 February. Women in jazz with Jean Hart and Joanne O'Brien.
10 March. Improvisation with Lindsay Cooper and friends.

Women's Report Benefit

25 February. Has been cancelled.

Camden Women's Centre Benefit

3 March. 8.00 at North London Poly, Prince of Wales Rd, Kentish Town, London NW5. Adm 60p (40p claimants).

Women Against Rape

4 March. 7.30-12.00 benefit at Carleton Centre, Princess Rd, London NW6. Clapperclaw and disco with DJ Terri Quayle. Food, raffle, booze. Women only. Adm 60p (40p unwaged).

Claimants Union Benefit

10 March. 8.00 at North London Poly, Ladbroke House, Highbury Grove, London N5. Two bands. Food, bar, creche.

Women's Music Weekend

17-19 March. At Wick Community Centre, nr Bristol. Programme includes a vocal workshop, basic music theory and rhythms, guitar and bass, wind, keyboards, congas, songwriting, PA and electrical equipment, structured and free im-

provisation, and discussions. The centre holds 50 women and the cost per person incl food will be £7. Send a sae to Alison Kayner by 1 March c/o Women's Arts Alliance, as above, and say which workshops you're interested in.

FILMS

Womanscene

Last days of a week of women's films organised by Thames Poly Women's Group as part of the Poly's annual film festival. At Thomas St, London SE18. Tickets 50p each.

23 February. *Occasional Work of a Female Slave*.

24 February. *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*.

25 February. *Chicago Maternity Centre*. Details of times from 01-855 0618.

19 March. *Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* ('72) with Joanne Woodward.

PLAYS

Floorshow and Kiss & Kill

Monstrous Regiment are touring with their two plays *Floorshow* a cabaret about women and work and *Kiss & Kill* about violence against women.

3/4 March. *Floorshow* at Woolwich Tramshed.

7 March. At Essex University.

8 March. At Key Theatre, Peterborough.

10 March. At Lowestoft Theatre Centre.

11 March. At Ipswich Drama Centre.

13 March. *Kiss & Kill* at Southend Women's Aid.

15-18 March. Both shows at Warwick University Arts Centre.

20/21 March. *Floorshow* for Hackney CP.

24-26 March at the Albany, Deptford.

Details about bookings from Sue Beardon (01-253 2172).

In Our Way

The Women's Theatre Group's hour-long entertainment with songs and comedy around the six demands of the women's liberation movement, and the changes they imply in women's and men's consciousnesses.

15 March. 8.00 at Battersea Arts Centre, Lavender Hill, London SW11.

18 March. At Chats Palace, Brooksby Walk, London E9.

21/22 March. 8.00 at the Albany, Deptford. Details from Julia (01-790 7649).

PUBLICATIONS

Squatters Handbook '78

* London Free Press 24

You're homeless. Okay, find yourself a small easily disposed of crowbar, a torch and a map of London. But first you read the *Squatters Handbook '78* sections

on the law, finding a place, and moving in. Then pick your area from the list of 4,000 vacant GLC houses recently published in *London Free Press*. Take a friend when you do it—you might not want to live on your own anyway, and you'll need a hand with the repairs later on. The *Squatters Handbook* again comes in handy with practical advice on how to get gas, electricity, and water, how to mend roofs, as well as how to defend your squat. All extremely useful. Don't let houses rot... squat. 20p each + postage. *Squatters Handbook '78* is available from: 2 St Paul's Rd, London N1; and *London Free Press* 24 from 138 Mayall Rd, London SE24.

Fightback

Fightback, the new bulletin against cuts in the National Health Service, is coordinated by members of the Hounslow Hospital Occupation Cttee, and through others involved in hospital campaigns like 'Save the EGA', 'Save St Nicks' and 'Plaistow Maternity Work-in'. But it is for everyone concerned with the state of the health service. "We want to find out what the cuts are, how they are affecting patient care, jobs and conditions, and what people in different areas are doing about them." The February '78 issue definitely lives up to this aim and gives an informative overview of what's happening in hospitals all over the country. 10p + postage from the Fightback team, c/o Hounslow Hospital Occupation Cttee, Hounslow Hospital, Staines Rd, Hounslow, Middx.

Hospital Hazards

A leaflet published by the NHS Hazards Group (part of the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science), listing the major hazards hospital workers face—a useful tool in the fight for safer working conditions. Over 20 copies 3p each + postage, from NHS Hazards Group, c/o Gene Feder, 4 Becondale Rd, London SE19.

Homeworking—A TUC Statement

This pamphlet aims to broaden discussions, particularly in the trade union movement, about the

situation of homeworkers (SR 66). Apart from providing very concise background information on homeworking conditions, it contains useful appendices on homeworking legislation in Germany and the GMWU's experience in organising homeworkers in Torrington. It ends by suggesting several practical proposals that can be taken up by trade unions, the government and employers. Available at 35p + postage from Congress House, Great Russell St, London WC1.

Barbara Charles

Women's Festival '77

The women involved in various aspects of the three weeks' Women's Festival at the Drill Hall, London, have written a report in which they share the experience and knowledge they gained. A limited number are being printed, due to lack of money, so order your copy now from Julie Parker c/o Women's Arts Alliance, as above.

Women and Social Security * National Welfare Benefits Handbook

The CPAG, who published the *National Welfare Benefits Handbook*, exposed that the state 'saved' more than £300 million on unclaimed benefits. Who loses out? You guessed, the poor. CPAG reckons benefits aren't claimed because we don't know what we're entitled to. Their handbook is an effort to reduce state 'saving'. The rule to follow is: if in doubt apply at once. *Women and Social Security* was first produced in '76 by Manchester women. London-based Rights of Women legal Collective have now updated the information and extended its application to London and other areas. "Society tends to assume that most women are supported by and dependent on men and we hope this guide will help women to be confident, to use their rights and to support each other." The *National Welfare Benefits Handbook*, 60p + postage from CPAG, 1 Macklin St, London WC2. *Women and Social Security*, 25p + postage from ROW, 2 St Paul's Rd, London N1.



FROM WOMEN AND SOCIAL SECURITY

LESBIANS HAVE SUCH SUPER KIDS

SUNDAY BALANCE

Last month *Spare Rib* took part in protests against the London *Evening News* which had run a series of sensationalist articles attacking lesbians who got pregnant through Artificial Insemination by Donor (see SR 67).

After a two hour occupation of their newsroom, we were promised the right of reply, and an unedited single column of type duly appeared on an inside page two days later. It was so easy we wished we'd asked for more—for a front page and centre spread like they gave to their garbage! But if what we'd written registered with some readers, it was worth it.

For us the protest raised questions about organisation within the women's movement—how to act quickly yet include as many women as possible—and about handling the press. For instance, many women were asked for interviews by 'liberal' journalists offering sympathetic coverage. But such coverage did no more than present a picture of lesbian 'families' as nice, 'normal' and no threat at all.

Here Susan Hemmings looks at the attitudes of the press, particularly the more liberal papers, to lesbian mothers.

"The miracle of the baby's growth in his mother's body, going on whether she takes thought or not, must be a source of perpetual wonder both to her and to her husband, drawing them closer in a new bond. In the beginning, there are, of

MPs worry

Criticism has come from MPs who say that such children cannot grow up in a natural environment and need 'normal' parents. They fear that the young ones will not grow into ordinary, well-balanced adults.

Observer 8/1

The doctor's activities are to be raised in Parliament by Tory MP's. Dr Rhodes Boyson, MP for Brent North called it "an horrific practice."

Guardian 7/1

Mrs. Jill Knight, Tory MP for Edgbaston, said: "I cannot imagine it is in the interest of children to be born in lesbian circumstances."

course, adjustments to be made. Some women are anxious about new experiences, and they worry about the responsibilities to come. They may even wonder at times whether they do after all want to have a baby and whether they can 'make a go of it'. Such misgivings are quite natural, and most women experience them, both before and after the arrival of the baby. The important thing is to get these fears out into the open: talk them over with your husband, or with the Nurse at the ante-natal clinic, or the Health Visitor, or of course, with your own mother, or a sympathetic married friend. At the same time keep yourself happily and usefully occupied and learn all you can about mothercraft."

The first couple of hundred words from *Mothercraft*, a book published by *Good Housekeeping*, and typical of the kinds of books offering us advice and support in the fifties and sixties. It's the usual combination of the mystical ('miracle' 'new bond'), appeals to authority and tradition (husband, health visitor, mother), and cosy common sense ('busily occupied'). But it is interesting because it emphasises the apprehension women feel about being taken over (that baby growing away in there whether I want it or not) while at the same time making sure women actually know they've got to submit to it all—they'll be changed radically by it, but with support from those in the know, they'll come to terms with it.

So while it is now generally accepted that motherhood changes your life, and radically, you only change from one set of roles to another, all predefined. And this second set is hung about with impenetrable mists of sentiment, and centuries of persuasive, sometimes frightening propaganda. We've been given to understand for generations that the mother-child bond is so very special, and so deep rooted in instinctual drives, that to sever it would have devastating effects—mainly on the child, and also on the mother. The idea of somehow even questioning the truth of such deeply rooted beliefs has to some seemed blasphemous. If you want to show that a woman is a really rotten egg, you have only to present her as someone who abandons her children. In December 1977 *The Observer* wanted to make it quite clear that Gudrun Enslin and Ulrike Meinhof were totally beyond the pale: they had both 'deserted their children'. Also in this article we have the assertion that:

"The desire to protect a young daughter from the outside world is as old as parenthood; the notion that one might have to protect the outside world against one's daughter is new and spreads fear far beyond those few households for which it will ever be a problem."

'As old as parenthood' seems to mean it is prehistorically ancient: and yet adults have only recently taken the extremely protective attitudes towards their young they do today. It is only for about three generations, in our

own culture, that the mass of children have lived out their childhoods 'protected' from work and sexual activity. Clearly people in groups care about and do things for each other, both those younger, older and the same age. But whether these feelings are biologically implanted in parents, especially, is highly questionable.

We only have to remind ourselves of the ways in which men have been trying to protect women from that same outside world: from the rapacious workings of the trade unions, from the jaws of educational establishments, the mean grasp of the worlds of law, medicine, and the terrible threats of the ministry in the frightening Anglican church. While the men protect us, we stay home protecting the children. And the state protects us all.

Some of the more suspect functions of protectiveness (especially paternalism) have been exposed for what they are by the women's movement: that is, covers for enslavement and oppression. Now we have to start on an analysis of the protective role laid upon us by men in the name of mothercraft. That is not to say we want to care less about children, or even necessarily spend less time with them, and we certainly don't want to expose them to hardship and exploitation. But the biologicistic myths which connect femininity with mothercraft and family life have to be opposed.

It is within this context that the issue of lesbian motherhood is important: it confronts the whole establishment network of motherhood, family life, and the upbringing (propagandising) of the young. It contains within it a compacted ambiguity, more complex than that confronting those unfortunate parents of the German revolutionaries: in the case of the lesbian mother, society has to protect the child from the mother.

Editors fret

THE *Evening News* today reveals the extraordinary and disturbing case of the London doctor who is helping lesbian couples to have babies.

Evening News 5/1

However strong the longings of lesbian women for children, the interests of their unborn babies should surely come first.

Daily Mirror 6/1

Since mothers are always depicted as protectors and nurturers, their crucial function of inculcating in children a sense of what is normal and abnormal in that society is comparatively invisible. However, it is clear from the furore against lesbian mothers that it is part of the mother's job to ensure 'normality' in the child. Nowadays it isn't the wolf at the door the mother keeps her child from, or the factory gates, but from all 'abnormalities', and especially those which subvert the image of the happy heterosexual family unit. The horror expressed against lesbians having children was firstly expressed in those terms: my god, they'll all grow up as queers.

It was Jean Rook, in the *Daily Express* of January 11, who most succinctly expressed this view. She chose to remind her readers that the cosy image of the cat-loving lesbian couple is just a front: in reality, she says, they are unstable hysterics, and each night, around bedtime, one of them starts to imagine she's a man. A child growing up in such a household, she says, would be damaged. Jean Rook is quite unable to imagine a sexual encounter which does not involve either a real or a surrogate male. Women making love without male supervision seems to her supremely disgusting—and somehow the children of the household would be tainted by it. Her attitudes are typical products of a culture which approves on the one hand a rigid heterosexual norm, and on the other a relentless and systematic concealment of sexual information from children.

Rent-a-shrink speaks

Dr Mia Kellmer Pringle, director of the National Children's Bureau, also said she was concerned. Children of lesbians, she said, would suffer from having no father, which could lead to a confusion of the child's sexual identity.

Guardian 6/1

What about the attitudes of the more liberal journalists? For it is relatively easy to knock Jean Rook, though seemingly impossible to educate her. In the *Sunday Times* of January 15, the issue was covered in the 'Behaviour' section. In this article much is made of rationality, and the empirical approach in the form of contemporary research: "Yet psychologists have evidence that growing up in a Lesbian household does no harm to children." At first it is not clear what this 'harm' could be, or how it could be measured. Then the journalist (Michael Pye) explains the work of American researcher Richard Green: "Green has examined 21 children aged 5-14, all of whom have been in homosexual households for at least three years. He found them almost distressingly normal—All-American boys and girls, choosing the toys, games and dress expected of their sex. Those old enough to report sexual fantasies were exclusively heterosexual." Normality here plainly means heterosexuality. And so 'coming to harm' must mean 'developing homosexual feelings'. The illogicality of it all is striking. Clearly, most lesbians alive today have been reared by heterosexual parents. So they 'came to harm' through exposure to straight parents. But these

same heterosexually raised women, now lesbians, have to assure society that they will raise their offspring 'harmlessly', that is, to be heterosexually inclined. Lesbian mothers become, as it were, doubly answerable for their own parents' terrible failure.

Sperms abused

Mr Raymond Booth, honorary secretary of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said: "I personally find this extremely bizarre. If donors knew that their sperm was going to lesbians, one can't help wondering if they would think this was a good thing."

Guardian 6/1

And Polly Toynbee refers to the same kind of research, but this time British, in the *Guardian* of January 16. She takes up the issue of lesbian mothers in terms of qualifications for parenthood—she points out that since mental deficiencies, ignorances and psychotics don't have to pass any tests, nor should lesbians. While the juxtapositions are a bit unfortunate, a telling point is being made—what is the fundamental objection to children living with lesbians? The assumptions behind the research she goes on to quote from answer her own question—it's the old 'coming to harm' argument, and by now we all see what that means. Susan Golombok, working on the British research for Michael Rutter (psychologist) says: "So far we have not found any children who appear to have been harmed by being brought up by lesbian mothers." (Although she does not mention it in this article, the same research has also to do with testing scholastic achievement—but in the reader's mind the reference to potential sexual deviance is the one which matters.) Polly Toynbee tells also of a lesbian couple who are now beginning to sleep apart, as part of their effort not to harm the child. Susan Golombok is quoted again: "There seems not to be any harmful effect on children's psychosexual development." Obviously, if anyone's psychosexual development is injured, it is more likely to be the lesbian women acting out some dishonest ritual of bedroom changing. However, they are not the subject of liberal and humane research at present, for which they might well be grateful.

Then, the *Morning Star* on January 17 gave a lucid account of how it all began: sneak reporters and lurid sensationalism. Mikki Doyle chooses, like the previous two writers, to emphasise the whole harmlessness of it: lesbians' children, she insists, are just like any others (read heterosexual). And she quotes Jackie and Nicki from *Sappho* as saying, "The only way they are different from other small children is that they do not cling to one mother, but go to either quite happily." Now one of the aims of those people who wish to explore alternative forms of childcare is that children should relate closely to a range of adults, not just their parents (if indeed parents are so identified). But by the particular use of this quote in the context of this article, the reader can only deduce one thing: the children of lesbians can have access to twice all those

mothercraft skills we know so well. Here is a vital clue to the liberal journalists' support of lesbian motherhood: their unshaken belief in the innate ability of women to mother. (Male cartoonists of the *Guardian*, *Punch* and *Observer*, however, persisted in portraying one of each pair of women as a pretend Daddy—ha ha.)

Mikki Doyle closes her article with a plea for tolerance: "Many sincere people have genuine reservations about homosexuality and its implications but are willing to admit their ignorance and possible prejudice." (This indicates to the readers that they could hold reservations about homosexuals and only possibly be prejudiced.) She continues: "They would be glad to discuss the matter in an atmosphere of friendship, tolerance and trust. The hope for such discussion has taken a severe battering during the last fortnight of media sensationalism." And on that note of rectitude the article ends.

The liberal journalists then, did what they could to reassure their readers that they had little to fear. Unlike their less aware colleagues they knew about tolerance, rationality and research. Lesbians as mothers? Live and let live—after all, their children are motherloved and they grow up straight.

A vital clue

Of the 10 babies born by this method to lesbian couples, nine are believed to be boys.

Evening News 5/1

Such tolerance is not to be relied upon: it has been based on misleading assumptions and false conclusions. A significant fact has been suppressed: many women are trying to bring up children to be different, to challenge and to change the pattern of family life. It is important to remember that it's not only lesbian mothers who stand to lose custody. Heterosexual feminists who dare to indicate their politics in court are also censured by the judges. Few women of either sexuality are prepared at present to take up the real issues in court.

By concentrating entirely on the issue of the children's sexuality, the press fail to grasp the fuller implications. Many women hope that their children will grow up understanding matters usually concealed from them and that they will oppose all concepts of oppressive 'normality'.

Evening Spews

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BOP BOP ★
see page 5

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groups

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► NALGAY The Nalgo gay group. Details from 7 Pickwick Court, West Park, London SE9 (please enclose SAE).

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► BURY ST EDMUNDS woman wishes to join or form Women's Group. Phone Mary Chipper BSTE 63200 or 67288.

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publications

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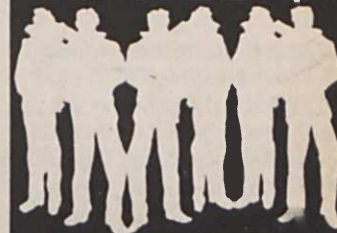
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Re-reading Barrett Browning



A curse from the depths of womanhood
Is very salt and bitter and good.'

These defiant lines were written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and they help to overthrow the saccharine picture that many of us have of her and her work. Cora Kaplan, who has written an introduction for a new edition of Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, here describes why she feels Barrett Browning is of interest to feminists today.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, born 1806, was the best known woman poet of Victorian England. So highly was she rated by contemporary readers and critics that she was a prominent candidate for poet laureate when Wordsworth died in 1850. Today most of her best poetry goes unread, with the significant exception of *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, a love sonnet sequence written for her husband, Robert Browning. Although she died in 1861 she remained an immensely popular poet until the turn of the century. Then her reputation waned rapidly. In 1932 Virginia Woolf wrote an enthusiastic essay about her to revive interest in her poetry and remind the common reader of its feminist bias.

Neither Woolf, nor the more recent renewal of interest in the Victorians, nor the feminist rediscovery of 'lost' women authors has entirely succeeded in getting her the modern audience she deserves or in rescuing her from the sentimental myth that has grown up around her life, a myth reinforced by popularisations of her courtship and marriage in various biographies and the play, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. These treatments ignore or de-emphasise her stature as a poet both before and after her meeting with Browning, so that her love sonnets appear to be a miraculous 'spontaneous' outpouring of feeling rather than highly crafted poems by a mature poet written during her most productive years.

Much of her later poetry, written between 1844 and her death, is public and political. Choosing modern subjects, she wrote impassioned anti-slavery verses, pleas for the liberation and unification of her adopted country, Italy, and, most important for feminists, poems which dealt with 'the woman question'. As early as 1844 she was publishing sonnets to her favourite novelist, George Sand. In 1856 she finished her most ambitious and exciting work, a long poem in blank verse about a young woman poet *Aurora Leigh*.

All of her later poetry makes good reading, for it is a revelation to hear a Victorian woman poet speak with such explicit anger, independence and eloquence about politics, art and women's lives. These poems, once read, efface the image of her foisted on us of sickly 'poetess' with long ringlets, rep-

resented in anthologies as the author of "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways." But if she had never written anything but *Aurora Leigh* she still deserves a place on every feminist's shelf. *Aurora Leigh* remains readable as a novel, a classic text on woman as writer, a notoriously difficult subject for women who write to deal with. It touches on raw areas of their own experience, areas of conflict between their women's role and their writer's integrity.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning hated the word 'feminine' even as a very young woman. It summed up for her every chauvinistic constraint on her development as a person and an artist. In the opening pages of *Aurora Leigh* she mounts a savage attack on her education at the hands of her conventional aunt who 'liked a woman to be womanly.' And English women, she thanked God and sighed . . . were models to the universe.' Aurora's aunt who ruled her life between thirteen and twenty taught her a series of 'accomplishments'; she learned to paint, play piano, dance and sew—all badly. The aunt forced on her 'a score of books on womanhood . . . books that boldly assert/Their right of comprehending husband's talk', books that praised women's 'Potential faculty in everything/Of abdicating power in it'.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was fascinated, even obsessed by the contradictions between her two identities, woman and poet. As the eldest and cleverest of a large family she was indulged by her father, Edward Moulton Barrett, and virtually allowed the freedom of his substantial library which included Mary Wollstonecraft as well as more respectable writers. She was permitted to study Greek and Latin with her brothers. Her father, though no intellectual, encouraged her writing and even its publication. Elizabeth's intermittent ill-health from adolescence onward made marriage unlikely though never impossible, but as the Barrett children grew up an unstated and irrational prejudice of Edward Barrett's became clear: he intended none of his children, least of all his eldest and favourite, to marry.

On the eve of her elopement Elizabeth wrote sadly of her father to Browning as

being hopelessly committed to a tyrannical system, 'all those patriarchal ideas of governing grown up children' as if they were 'chattels'. Yet the paradox is that it was his early permissiveness which granted her the intellectual freedom to develop her talents, a permission emphatically denied to most Victorian women. Far from being strictly autobiographical *Aurora Leigh* is in places an anti-biography to Elizabeth Barrett's early history. In the poem the young poet's father dies, conveniently when she is 'just thirteen', just at the point of menstruation ('life's agonies'), so that Aurora gets the benefits but not the drawbacks of her father's liberal education and affection. With unnerving honesty *Aurora Leigh* probes the psychological and social difficulties of embarking on an unconventional career while remaining a genteel woman. Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* are novels on parallel themes written some hundred years later.

Like these later works *Aurora Leigh* was a source of strength and enlightenment to a rising generation of restless and talented women, ambitious to tackle male strongholds but unwilling to forego love, sexual fulfilment or social acceptance as a necessary penalty. It is in many ways a much more optimistic tale than either modern novel, for Aurora learns her craft as a poet with the usual traumas and failures common to young writers, but she manages to survive her twenties alone, sane and successful, if lonely and somewhat unhappy. Elizabeth Barrett Browning never makes the woman writer's life sound glamorous, but she does something much more subversive; she makes it sound possible, interesting, and most important for her Victorian audience, respectable. In the end Aurora manages to convert her cousin-suitor to her belief in the social effect of art and away from his 'misguided' experiments in utopian social reforms, and so gets her man without compromising her politics or her vocation.

In writing such an optimistic narrative Barrett Browning was deliberately revising the ending of a well-known romantic novel by Mme de Stael, *Corinne*, in which a poet-heroine not unlike Aurora loses her aristo-

cratic English lover, and eventually declines and dies precisely because he is unwilling to take a talented and publicly acclaimed woman as a wife. Although marriageability is not so crucial an issue for twentieth century women, *The Bell Jar*, Plath's poetry, and Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* seem to turn away from Barrett Browning's hopeful prognosis towards the more melancholy moral of de Stael's *Corinne*: the price of independent talent for women is increased difficulty in achieving either emotional stability or stable loving relationships. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was insistent that the conflict could be resolved. Her new woman, Aurora, calls for the dawn of a new era when she asks rhetorically 'Must I work in vain / Without the approbation of a man? / It cannot be, it shall not.'

When I started reading Elizabeth Barrett Browning's writing some years ago, as part of a larger project on women poets, I was amazed at the vigour and wit of her poetry, its range and its daring use of female sexual

their lives as well as the tendency of their work. Both were ambitious, respectable professional writers who married poets. Good liberals in their politics, they shied away from political feminism but developed in their verse a ruthless analysis of the ways in which women internalise and accept socially oppressive female identities. Barrett Browning discovers and Plath rediscovers the female body and its functions as rich metaphors for women's psychological and social struggle towards intellectual and emotional autonomy. The links between the two poets indicate areas where a century of progress and change in the situation of women has been largely superficial. Both Barrett Browning and Plath had very rich poetic traditions to draw on but they were traditions moulded by male poets and male critical tastes. Each felt isolated but opposed to taking cover in a bluestocking asexual image of themselves as women intellectuals. They might have chosen to identify with the more vigorous political feminism around them or become more radical in other ways; instead they clung to a basically conservative intellectual establishment.

Each poet found instead a sort of cultural remedy for their situation, turning inward into their poetry, mining female ex-

siderable power. For myself, I rejoice in the success, both as a woman and a human being. Oh, and is it possible that you think a woman has no business with questions like the question of slavery? Then she had better use a pen no more. She had better subside into slavery and concubinage herself I think, as in the times of old, shut herself up with the Penelopes in the 'women's apartment', and take no rank among thinkers and speakers."

Her 'desire' for George Sand and other women writers was that they acknowledge and defend their 'female nature', not hide it behind male pseudonyms or masquerade in drag. Her position has largely been adopted by many women in the movement writing today.

Barrett Browning had several committed feminist friends who were also socialists of sorts, yet she neither understood nor trusted the self-generated consciousness or collective struggles of the working classes, though she sensed and expressed the common oppression of women across class lines. Her reference group was, finally, her own class, her attitudes a fiercely female articulation of liberal Victorian individualism. This too is a danger in modern women's writing. But no Victorian writer on the 'woman question', and there were many, male and female, went so deeply or imaginatively into the contradictions which the desire for equality posed for bourgeois women. Her letters to Browning, and various other correspondents illuminate these insights when read alongside her poetry.

Apart from anything else, Elizabeth



50s girl's annual view of Elizabeth Barrett Browning



perience for their work, but focussing on art and the individual. Their rejection of conventional femininity appears in their verse more strikingly than in their lives. Concentrated in language, it shouts at us from the page, touches, sparks and explains our own angers. But in slightly different terms for each of them it is an anger that attempted to resolve itself through aesthetics alone, rejecting action except of the most private kind. When we read Barrett Browning or Plath we should remember that in discovering a woman writer we uncover not only their triumphs but also their failures and limitations and, by analogy, our own.

On a more positive note Elizabeth Barrett Browning gave unlimited encouragement to other women writers, personally and through her own work and example. She defended women's right to write on political subjects like slavery, praising the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to a timid woman friend:

"Her book is quite a sign of the times, and has otherwise an intrinsically con-



Barrett Browning tried in *Aurora Leigh* to dispel the myth already gathering around her romance and marriage, the myth of the sleeping beauty rescued by the good prince from the vile father-king. Aurora makes her own destiny. Barrett Browning made hers. One of the determining factors in her marriage was her father's refusal to let her go south to Italy in the winters with relatives and friends, as her doctors insisted. Convinced that this proved that her father's selfishness exceeded his love and cancelled her duty she rebelled fully, walked, eloped and survived—to write about a healthy younger woman who made her way as a poet without male protection, indicating to her public that this was the real lesson of her life and career. ●

Aurora Leigh (£2.95) is reprinted this month by the Women's Press.

imagery. I had been made to read Tennyson and Robert Browning at school, and again at my all-female university. No one suggested that beyond *Sonnets from the Portuguese* there was another Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a more rebellious writer on 'the woman question' than either of the Brontës, a poet who made the bland medieval epics of Browning and Tennyson seem remote and dated. Barrett Browning disliked the 'fairy-tale' as a conventional frame for long narrative poems. She wanted poetry that was as topical as the novels of Dickens or Elizabeth Gaskell. A distaste for Victorian materialism is reflected in her reference to her 'age of steam' and 'pewter', but she also saw the era as a rich and fecund period, 'the paps from which we all have sucked'. Contemporary critics of *Aurora Leigh* were shocked both at the cold and unconventional heroine and the violent, lavish, indecent imagery, but no one doubted the poem's power. A century later, when I was at university studying English literature, its subject and treatment were too provocative, too disturbing, too anti-Victorian for the prim postwar fifties where the object of female education was to make us intelligent wives and mothers.

The same English department that kept *Aurora Leigh* from us, also taught Sylvia Plath, the modern poet most alike in talent and temperament to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. There are certain similarities in

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theatre

MIDLANDS CHRISTMAS PANTOMIMES

To find fault with pantomime is akin to attacking the institution of Christmas itself, but both could do with some investigation. If a pantomime works well as an hilarious entertainment (and some do) then it is not for women to be killjoys and deny the fact. But good or bad, the message is clear: boy (girl) gets girl. The male (female Principal Boy) hero rescues the Leading Lady, generally a princess, from some contrived danger, singing as (s)he goes.

Immortals take the stage and tell us we are in for a bout of magic, and the idea is that we should suspend our disbelief, or at least pay for our children to do so. But then we are led into the story's pedestrian sequences, re-inforced by the basic theme of good and evil, with a chorus of girls or young women who have about as much collective magic as a plate of cold porridge. In *Mother Goose* at the Belgrade, Coventry, the Belgrade Babes display their scrubbed faces, short gymslips and pert answers as they are put through a crash course in banality.

Dick Whittington (at the Grand, Woolhampton), *Cinderella* (Birmingham Hippodrome) and *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Haymarket, Leicester), to name but three, all have this girly chorus. It is led by the Principal Boy and his beloved—mere ciphers—while the men of the cast (the Dame, the two stooges, and so on) have a good time and make us laugh. The good fairies, too, are simpering wets compared with the bad-dies, the male demons who flash and snarl across the stage.

Women are not entrusted with any role that might induce a wild reaction from the audience, be it hissing, cheers or laughter. Jack (Christina Matthews) for example, dashes from microphone to microphone determining in song to find Princess Felicia's "beautiful face". Julie Rogers as Dick Whittington trots out her hit, *The Wedding*, before the finale, which in every show is what it is, more or less.

If the main protagonist is only a singing pair of legs and the heroine remarkably similar, but with legs demurely covered, then not only are we getting the stereotyped romantic picture but it is women who are being lumbered with playing it.



Lyndy Lawson as Mah-Jing in *The Kingfisher Quest* at Brum Studio. Designed by Priscilla Truett. A story well told and acted with minimum of props.

These shows are billed as 'family' entertainments that give offence to no-one (ie have no dirty jokes) and mostly they stay firmly in well-trying territory and stimulate nothing. On the other hand, in the shows that really involve the children, that demand something other than the ritual squawking ("Oh yes he is!"), and genuinely entertain the whole audience, the women are given parts of equal substance to those of the men. Barbara New, in *Emu in Pantoland* (Coventry Theatre), waving her bent wand, says "What a caper this is!"—inadvertently giving an intelligent fairy commentary on pantomime in general. She is allowed to be funny and she fills the stage. The story is vitalised by everyone's acting, no-one is left to be passive.

In *Aladdin* (Alexandra, Birmingham) Barbara Windsor plays the Principal Boy as an active, humorous woman, a hero(ine) we can enjoy watching. But her princess was expected to be mere decoration and succeeded magnificently.

At the Victoria, Stoke-on-Trent, *Robin Hood* is given new treatment. Good still triumphs, but the wedding is left out and the hero and heroine are on an equal footing. Marion is no limpid maid, but a lively urchin who keeps

Robin, Prince John and the bad witch on their toes and plays a major part in rescuing good King Richard's wife.

The witch, a powerful and frightening character, rules the snivelly Prince John, and there is all-round relief when she is transformed (with the children's help) back into a tree.

In *School for Clowns* (Haymarket) a theatrical equivalent of Minnie the Minx is in the vanguard of the anarchic class activities of the pupils against their teacher. And the children's delighted reaction to "teechur duz poohs", written by a clown on the blackboard, is far greater in volume than to any climbing of beanstalks or rubbing of lamps.

It took a woman, Penny Cherns, (the only female director of any of these shows) to use clowns to identify real childhood humour and school room frustration. More theatre people should read the Beano.

It's ironic that these shows specifically written for children are thematically more adult, intelligent and egalitarian than their 'family' counterparts. They show that romance and tinsel are not essential for the captivation of children's imaginations, no more than is the implication of women's helplessness.

Joanna Klaces

MARY RAYNER



Inside the van the driver was singing softly to herself:
*Fried or boiled, baked or roast,
or minced with musheyrooms on toast?*
Garth Pig heard her. It was not a song about ice-cream.

children's books

MR AND MRS PIG'S
EVENING OUT (£2.50)
GARTH PIG AND THE
ICECREAM LADY (£3.25)
both by Mary Rayner
(Macmillan)

One of the most successful picture books of 1976 was Mary Rayner's *Mr and Mrs Pig's Evening Out*, in which eldest sister Sorrel takes the lead in thwarting Mrs Wolf while the parents are out for the evening. Despite outstanding features, that book did not get reviewed in *Spare Rib* at the time—its nuclear sex roles saw to that. With the appearance in 1977 of an equally successful sequel, *Garth Pig and the Icecream Lady* featuring the same pig family and similar qualities, including a special tribute to *SR*, there's no holding back.

Garth Pig and the Icecream Lady repeats the successful formula of *Mr and Mrs Pig's Evening Out*, which is an inspired modern version of the traditional stories of the wolf tackling the three little pigs, or the seven little kids, or Little Red Riding Hood. In other words, a simple scare story,

reviews

SALLY GREENHILL



A working life—Hackney health visitor.

drawing on the primeval fear of being eaten, all happily resolved with the demise of the hairy beast. All those classical ingredients are in Mary Rayner's two books, but integrated with style and humour into situations of today. In *Mr and Mrs Pig's Evening Out*, the Wolf is the unsuspected babysitter who thus has easy access to the sleeping piglets, all ten of them, snugly tucked up in their 5 bunk beds, from which Mrs Wolf will try and choose her dinner "all rosy, plump and pink". Scary stuff indeed.

In *Garth Pig and the Icecream Lady*, the wolf is there again, here as Madame Lupino, who under the guise of selling icecream from a van on a very hot day, snatches the youngest of the family/litter and drives off with the intention of devouring him in the forest. The van breaks down, the other piglets catch up and all's well.

Important features for *SR* readers in both books are the female wolf, the gutsy resourceful Sorrel, the autonomy of the children, with girls and boys playing together, and—small but significant detail—Madame Lupino is a forceful driver and does not flinch from tackling the breakdown by herself.

Other strong features in both books are the tight, rounded stories, the humorous, closely observed detail of family life and of the children's point of view: "Now piglets . . . your father and I are going out this evening." There was a chorus of groans. "Not far," said Mrs Pig, "and I've asked a very

nice lady to come and look after you."

The illustrations are excellent, creating atmosphere, movement and situations with warmth and verve, while the accompanying text is tight and yet colourful, clearly the work of an experienced story teller.

Mr and Mrs Pig in the first book came over as just too traditional for comfort. In *Garth Pig and the Icecream Lady*, Mrs Pig is seen throughout scrubbing the floor. But at the end, she collapses across two chairs, exhausted, with a copy of *Spare Rib* opened out on her chest. There's hope for her yet!

Andrew Mann

Children's Rights Workshop

books

DUTIFUL DAUGHTERS

Edited by Jean McCrindle &

Sheila Rowbotham

(Allen Lane £5.95)

WORKING LIVES

Vol 2 Hackney 1945-77

(Centreprise 95p)

To speak, to write about our past selves has become an established feminist genre. It's a tradition common enough, of course, for any oppressed group reaching towards some self-constructed identity and history. But given the special edge of the ideal of the inter-fusion of public and private in feminist work, this tradition carries an extra responsibility.

Confessionals have their dangers, most obviously that of retrospectively reconstructing a life or a narrative to fit some given set of acquired theories—to make too easy a transition from blindness to post-conversion light.

The title and subtitle of *Dutiful Daughters—Women Talk About Their Lives* might suggest that this kind of confessional is being offered. But in this book the "talking-about" isn't over-interpreted or closed; fourteen women speak, and what they say is sometimes repetitive or tentative, sometimes humorous or bitter. Most are from working- or lower-middle-class backgrounds, and aged from over seventy to the early thirties. They speak as children, wives, mothers, workers. Without "typicality", common pre-occupations and desires emerge.

Thus, poverty and work; "And I had boots, like tackity boots, and this mauve velvet dress, and that's how I went to the factory in Dunfermline." Memories of mothers who struggled on; "because my father left her and that, from time to time when she couldn't get the Relief money she had to take in washing"; many mothers who were hated for their harshness; "I used often to say how I was treated I would never treat mine." Extremes of sexual and anatomical ignorance are recalled, and several speakers express their determination that it will be different between them and their own daughters; "No, she didn't tell any of us anything. Somewhere my sister Annie managed to learn—oh well, she worked in a factory, you see, she may have got it there."

Some women describe inaccessible clinics, patronising doctors, contraception which was hard to obtain or resented by husbands. Barren housing; "It was an isolated council estate so it was hard to reach and there was nothing—they forgot to build the shops and they only built the pubs and the churches." Work as an escape; "If I could have gone into the factory when the kids were little—yes; I mean, compared to being at home, the factory was a fun palace really, the factory was utopia."

And for a few, direct political engagement. Annie Davison recalls the Socialist Sunday School movement as a child in Glasgow, and the Labour Co-operatives. Of politics now; "We felt the upper echelons, as they say, of the Labour Groups or the Labour Party, mostly now they have all changed from the working-class ideal they had before . . . I

think they tend—unless the rank and file remind them enough—they tend to forget that we're looking for a socialist state, not just a capitalist state run in a sort of social democracy; this we don't want." Most vividly, from some of the older women especially, a sense of affections forced and channelled, of opportunities lost; "you never had much of a teenager's life, because you had to go either in the forces or work in one of the munitions factories" . . . "I think if I had a daughter she would have had a lot of love that I didn't get and she might not have been as aggressive as I was" . . . "Girls in Scotland are easy game because they are so starved of affection—their mothers seem to shove it onto the boys, all their affection."

Working Lives: Vol 2, Hackney 1945-1977 is produced at an affordable price by the People's Autobiography of Hackney group. Four women and nine men describe the small details of their jobs, how they chose, fell, or drifted into them, and their future hopes. Many are service workers; of the women who speak, there's a health visitor, a housewife who is also a night cleaner, a hairdresser and a machinist. Those who are happy, if only spasmodically, in their work extract their satisfaction from the chance human contacts it produces. As in *Dutiful Daughters*, several express a sense of lost chances, of force of circumstances. The photographs of the narrators at work are essential illuminations of what is voiced, and do their work of enlivening the text beautifully.

As a record by and of people who've managed to evade some of the deadening by accident, skill or humour, this is a valuable book. But the absence of that complete interweaving of emotional and domestic and public detail which constitutes the accounts in *Dutiful Daughters* leaves residual curiosities as to what happens when they all get home.

Denise Riley

THE WOMAN WARRIOR

by Maxine Hong Kingston

(Allen Lane £3.95)

Maxine Hong Kingston was born in America, her parents having emigrated from China in the 30s. With electrifying imagery she recreates a fabric of Chinese myths, (the gifts of her mother, Brave Orchid, who speaks of her past life in China in 'talk stories') and delicately weaves ties with the new culture in America which she must assimilate to survive. Kingston articulates the confusion of

reviews

trying to integrate the "ghosts" and "myths" of her Chinese heritage with the "barbarian" culture she daily confronts. "To make my waking life American-normal, I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams, which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories."

Although *The Woman Warrior* is specifically about the cultural schism in a Chinese/American woman's development, it is also about a woman's ability to carve out her own reality in the face of a vastly more naked form of misogyny than western women confront. In old Chinese culture, where patriarchy enshrined the grossest forms of cruelty toward women, (foot-binding, slavery, wife-beating) survival appeared to be women's major achievement. However, some women not only survived but went on to be healers and exorcists, like Brave Orchid, whose husband left her in China when he emigrated to America.

Brave Orchid was thirty-seven when she received her diploma. It had taken two years to become proficient in

Midwifery, Pediatrics, Gynaecology, Medicine, Surgery, Nursing and Bandage. Brave Orchid then returned to her village to work as a physician. She only treated those who were not dying, thereby gaining a fine reputation in a short period of time.

Brave Orchid also purchased a slave to assist in her medical practice; Kingston questions her about slaves and the cost of one . . .

"What happened to the slave when you came to America?" "I found her a husband."

"How much money did you pay to buy her?"

"One hundred and eighty dollars."

"How much was it in American money?"

"Fifty dollars. That's because she was sixteen years old. Eight year olds were about twenty dollars. Five year olds were about ten dollars . . . Babies were free. During the war, though, when you were born, many people gave their older daughters away for free. And here I was in the United States paying two hundred dollars for you" [to be born].

Kingston's ability to depict

the devaluation of women in Chinese culture, through her mother's eyes, and her own experience is stark and without sentimentality.

"The midwife or relative would take the back of a girl baby's head in her hand and turn her face into the ashes," said my mother. 'It was very easy.'"

And again, at dinner at her great-uncle's with her cousins, she coolly treats us to a feast of verbal misogyny.

"When my sisters and I ate at their house, there would be six girls eating. The old man opened his eyes wide at us and turned in a circle, surrounded. His neck tendons stretched out. 'Maggots!' he shouted. 'Maggots! Where are my grandsons? I want grandsons! Give me grandsons! Maggots!'"

The *Woman Warrior* in itself is not a feminist book, however, its strength lies in the portrayal of women's survival in the face of enormous oppression. Maxine Hong Kingston has given women an image of their power that is unforgettable.

Lynne Hutton-Williams

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reviews



music

NACPUNK
National Abortion
Campaign benefit
(London)

Girls in pink stilettos with pink plastic specs in their hair; clumps of boys pogo, shooting up and crashing

heads together, staking out territory in front of the stage; a smattering of feminists commiserate "I feel about 70—they all look so *young*." London's Roundhouse was crammed on January 15 for NACPUNK—a benefit concert for the National Abortion Campaign, an amazing mixture of people and bands, with Xray Spex 'top of the bill'. (New wave and women's movement may resist stars,

but Poly Styrene is quite a name!)

Sadista Sisters, on first, really piss me off—I suppose they're sending up sexism with charades of music entrepreneurs fucking queues of young hopefuls, but their anti-sexism is ambiguous, and so clumsy and slow. Between acts they alternate tough liberated songs with sweetening slush. Only the slapstick made me laugh, making grotesque

tomato sauce sandwiches to throw at the audience. And that's been done before.

Dead Fingers Talk I did like, but some people had the same problems about the ambiguity of what they were doing. I'd been told in advance they were a gay men's band, so I saw their song *There's Something Not Quite Right About Harry* (picture) as strong satire. People round me seemed clear what it was

PICTURES: MARK RUSHER

reviews

about; one black leather heavy jeering 'wankers' and 'queers' at the band knew what he was afraid of. Only later I heard left-wing indignation that NAC had booked a queer-bashing band.

Black Slate played polished but predictable reggae, then Xray Spex bounced on—Poly Styrene in fifties suit, silver blue and knee-clinging, with a ribbon in her frizzy hair. "I don't know about aborr-r-tions..." she drawled, ripping into her latest single *Oh Bondage Up Yours*. She's got fantastic stage presence and witty lyrics:

*When I put on my make-up
The pretty little mask, not me
That's the way a girl should be
In a consumer society
(ART-I-FICIAL).*

But even that got boring, as the music thumped on.

The concert made loads of money—£2350 to get NAC out of the red (the bands all played for nothing)—and it drew a huge crowd. Politically it was a wasted opportunity—a few leaflets and posters would have helped, some badges for sale, a lurex 'Woman's Right To Choose' banner over the stage. There were no clues it was a benefit, let alone what for, until one woman tried to make a speech near the end and got booed off—inevitably: speeches are boring. Only Rock Against Racism were at work outside, selling their paper *Temporary Hoarding*, complete with Poly Styrene interview.

Many feminists felt the event was out of their control: the Roundhouse ruled, men guarded the doors, put on the records, brought on the bands. I felt that too, but would have been glad that the music wasn't 'ours', the audience not just 'us'—if only we'd made clear who 'we' were.

Jill Nicholls

NEVER LETTING GO (CBS) PHOEBE SNOW

Pleasant enough but a frustrating album from Phoebe Snow—disappointing songs and the reined-in quality of her voice left me feeling that it could have been a lot better.

This record is so tasteful that some of it could pass for muzak—supermarket music. Masses of strings and controlled solos by representative middle 8's from each section of the band set up a s(t)olid base—but Phoebe Snow's voice never quite soars away as it keeps seeming about to. Most of the songs are distinctly B-side in their instant forgettability. Those that work best are the

two faster boppy *Love Makes A Woman*, *Ride The Elevator* and the 50-year-old *Garden Of Joy Blues*. At least there are shades of what one *could* do on these.

Most lyrics are of the usual dependent woman I-won't-be-fulfilled-till-I-get-my-man~ (back) boring old type. More encouraging is one she wrote herself, *We're Children*. And the enticingly named *Electra* isn't concerned with the myth or perhaps I'm insensitive to the subtlety of the lyrics.

She sings so we can hear the words; they are written down as well. It's a pity they weren't a bit more original and involving. But thanks for the memorable line!... 'He can squeeze a woman like a milk-fed hen but he don't scare me...'

Pam Sherwood

MILLIE JACKSON

In concert (London)

Millie Jackson is assertive and together, kicking off her eight-piece band, taking care of business, having such fun. She's aware of all the acoustical technicalities and when the sound system went wrong, pinpointed the trouble right away. At the same time she makes quite a production of making clear she knows what she's doing.

On stage at the Hammer-smith Odeon, she was mock-masculine in black bowtie and suit with spangled silver waistcoat and lapels. Born in Georgia in America's Deep South, she's caught on through a trilogy of 'concept albums' about triangular relationships. *Caught Up*, *Still Caught Up* and *Feeling Bitchy* combine lengthy 'raps' with songs which show a deep and resonant voice. On record she's often very moving but on stage it's clearly not romance she's singing about but sex, and the sex war. She spells out the hype in sexual relationships, then turns round and demands equal satisfaction.

No way is Millie Jackson a feminist, though you can see why 'Straight Promotions' originally planned to sell her as "the liberated Ms Jackson" (they soon switched to a 'bitchy', 'raunchy' image). Yet unlike other Black "sex symbols", she doesn't prowl. Millie Jackson strides around the stage. And she just can't be serious for a moment. A resonant heart-cry about how she can't bring herself to change the pillow-case that smells of "his" cologne—"Will he ever come again?"—turns into a long (and tedious) joke about coming. Her whole act is full of self-parody. She



Millie Jackson.

laughs about the way she throws her head back when trying to look nonchalant, almost losing her wig in the process. She holds her audience and makes you really laugh—and that's quite something.

She acts herself dressing up to go and get an old boyfriend back—putting on her "longest hair", a skirt to *here*, a squirt of perfume behind each ear and up her cunt. She lets you know it's her most expensive perfume—a big outlay for big returns. These are real capitalist sex relations, not the feudalism of romance. It's a competition between the men and the women, and between the women to catch the men. When she encounters her rival, she employs competitive rhythms to underscore the point.

The special effects and the

NEXT MONTH: Dusty Springfield and Joni Mitchell.

loving words are calculated. She knows that men want to hear lies—"any old lie, it doesn't matter as long as you make him feel good"—and she spends her free time (that is, while her man is with his wife), making up the lies she thinks he'd like to hear. "If you tell him he can't screw, you gets no bread—so you go along with the programme." She wants the bread; she knows that playing the sexy lady is work, but that being married is harder—"When you go down to the laundromat you don't have to wash nobody's funky drawers but your own."

At the same time she wants a "good piece—I don't have to tell you, you all know what I mean by a good piece." Knowing and delighted laughter from men and women alike, recognising the pleasure as well as the frustration that she acts so well. Her parody of the he-man fuck—"Up-down, up-down, and thinking he's doing something"—is brilliant, and her cunnilingus routine, where she discusses the role played by various kinds of beard, is hilarious.

The line is somewhere between Wages for Housework and *Cosmopolitan*: Wages for

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film

CADDIE

Directed by Donald Crombie

Many women I have talked to enjoyed this film, and felt it was a step forward in the portrayal of women in the commercial cinema. It may be that raised hopes before seeing Caddie led to my anger afterwards. It is the story of an ordinary middle class woman who brings up two children on her own during the Depression in Australia. She's a good woman—she smiles graciously at her fellow barmaids' coarse jokes; very nice men fall instantly in love with her—in fact every man is very nice to her, even in bars and rough parts of town, because they respect her "class", although some not very nice women are not so polite to her; she manages to keep her looks (unlike the woman who took her husband from her, who develops a particularly ugly form of TB, and unlike the not very polite prostitute in the next flat, whose hair is all messed up) and her stylish dresses, even when her children are (politely) hungry.

It is clearly a Feminist Film, because Caddie says at one point "When I went to sign the HP form, they asked me what my husband's name and occupation were! As if it wasn't me that was going to give them the money!" But being Feminist doesn't stop it from being a Romance, with a handsome rich Greek who will (because we know he is an honourable man) marry her when his divorce comes through. And he has a lovely turn of phrase, in a Romantic foreign accent—"You are beautiful . . . all over." (They have just slept together for the first time, nudge.) "But what's inside—what shines out through your eyes—that's the most beautiful of all."

The last shot of the film, however, is not Caddie going off into the sunset with him. It is Caddie being consoled for her hard life by having two beautiful children bouncing up and down on her. It does make a touching picture. But you are left in no doubt that she would rather marry a rich man. Let's be honest, women have said to me, that is what most ordinary women (as opposed to us feminists) would prefer. It is a *real* story, after all.

That to me is the most aggravating thing about the film. It is based on a woman's autobiography; and in reality the author must have suffered enormously, even if men were all kind and supportive to her. But the film is absolutely pretty—shot in soft focus throughout, in pinks and soft browns—and Caddie herself is always graceful and kind, with lipstick intact and manners immaculate, through scenes that are on paper distressing—dying child who pulls through after a tense night, you know, that sort of thing—and oppressive—inadequate childcare (though she always finds something that leaves the children beautiful and well-adjusted) and unemployment (though she gets the job). The film knows the Sort of Problems women in her situation must have suffered although we're given to understand it's nobody's fault. But I didn't feel I had witnessed any real hardship. It all looked very easy to be a single mother in the Depression, if you were a nice woman who smiled in a wholesome way. But it's a lie. ●

Ruth Wallsgrove

Housework where every aspect of being a woman—all the dressing up and posing—is housework, done for men's benefit and in need of a wage to make clear what the relationship's about, and the *Cosmo* world of suspicion, women jabbing up from under, exploiting men for what they can get, but still hoping for pleasure on the way.

Even if every man in the audience was hoping his was the big prick she was looking for (she acted out the fantasy by pretending to pick up a photographer in the pit by the stage), Millie Jackson made them squirm, too. Although a lot of her politics are wrong—her anti-gay remarks were just a means of scoring a cheap laugh—her on-stage attitude and the idea of self-determination she projects make a change from the usual 'Stand by your man' line in Black music.

Jill Nicholls and Val Wilmer

Correction

We referred in 'Blood Money' (SR 65) to Mary Ellman's book as *Talking About Women*. The title is in fact *Thinking About Women*, and the book is being republished in Britain this year by Virago.

Swept Away^x



A Film by LINA WERTMULLER · Starring GIANCARLO GIANNINI and MARIANGELA MELATO

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PART 1



As there were so many articles from the Tyneside area, we'll be publishing the reports from the coastal groups in Issue 70.

NEWCASTLE

When you think of shipbuilding, engineering, steel production, and coal mining, you think of the north of England—Tyne-side for example. Although Tyneside was once the centre of Britain's industrial power, today the picture is different. The traditional heavy industries have been declining for some time and throwing many men on the dole. Today light engineering and assembly plants are taking their place, but unlike the previous industries that depended on skilled male labour, these are attracted to Tyneside by the availability of unskilled and unorganised female labour. There is also the growing service sector—mainly lower paid clerical jobs in local and central government offices—that are drawing women into employment. This, briefly, is the industrial setting in which we are working.

Hilary and Penny

ROADGANG

At last! There's now a Women's Theatre group in the North East. Roadgang was originally formed as a Socialist Theatre group and tried to raise questions concerning the exploitative nature of capitalist society and the particular oppression of gays, blacks and women. When the three men left last autumn we decided to continue. Our method of working remains much the same—we run on a collective basis and everyone contributes to the discussions and writing of the shows.

Our decision to become an all women's group reflects our commitment to the Women's Movement and our belief in autonomous organisations for oppressed groups. We are now specifically concerned with women's struggles. Since this change we have gained confidence in our ability to put forward ideas both verbally and theatrically and discussions have become more open and honest. Our new, more specific focus has helped unify us and create a greater feeling of trust, which is an essential part of working together. This, in turn, has resulted in a greater commitment to the movement. For us it's another dimension of the idea of the personal as political.

Roadgang has worked in streets, pubs, clubs, community centres, colleges and union halls, performing cabaret type shows. Much of the work has been written and performed for particular organisations such as The Nursery Action Campaign, Housing Groups, National Federation of Women's Aid and National Abortion Campaign. Last Autumn we supported the Socialist Unity candidate standing in the Ladywood by-election by doing anti-racist songs and sketches in the street and at a demonstration against a National Front meeting.

At present we are performing two shows. 'Opportunity Blocks', based on the TV equivalent, aims to show, through variety acts, the lack of opportunity for women in education, employment and trade unions. 'Bouncing Back', written by Pirate Jenny Team Two, exposes the misogyny underlying the arguments of anti-abortionists. We also have about half an hour of songs and sketches relating to women and we're thinking about a possible show on women and health.

Roadgang has received a grant since 1976, but it barely covers wages. We still try to do gigs for a reasonable fee—sometimes this is expenses only. We've a long history of doing benefits for impoverished organisations—how about a Roadgang benefit?! If we get a grant next year we'll return to being a company of seven. At the moment four of us are doing everything—administration alone takes hours. Sisterhood is working wonders with us, but we need more sisters if we're to keep sane and stay together!

Chris, Katie, Yvonne and Chris

SOCIALIST FEMINISTS

Many socialist feminists here have been forming a socialist alliance at the Socialist Centre. It has been fairly successful in breaking down sectarianism—most local branches of the revolutionary groups are affiliated and many disillusioned Labour Party members are actively involved as are a number of shop stewards' committees.

There have been talks on the politics of sexuality, feminism and socialism, Troops Out Movement, the growth of a socialist opposition in Eastern Europe, shop stewards committees on workers' plans for socially useful products, and the campaign against the deportation of Philip Agee. The Centre has also campaigned against the National



Front and played a leading role in supporting the firemen's strike. It runs a bookshop and has plans for a bookclub—both it's hoped will encourage the development of a socialist culture rooted in the working class communities. All the activities are organised through various working groups that are responsible to a monthly general meeting of supporters—now there are over 120.

This sort of alliance is new and experimental—we don't have models to guide us. Problems and arguments have developed with it—like over the sexism that exists in the left. A Women's Centre was set up in the same building and the relationship between the two hasn't always been easy—the men haven't always understood the importance and problems of the Women's Movement and some feminists have been hostile to socialism, seeing it as a 'male' ideology. Such problems have sometimes given credibility to the false idea that socialism and feminism are irreconcilable. This is changing as more of us get involved in the Socialist Centre's activities and introduce a feminist approach.

Hilary and Penny

VIDEO/FILM GROUP

Although the idea of working with video and film had been discussed previously, it wasn't until a lively well-attended meeting, following the Reclaim the Night march, that a group was actually formed. One of our intentions was to take our ideas into schools, youth clubs, playgrounds etc. This initially centred around the rape issue, but we wanted to relate this to the underlying issues such as images of women in the media and sex differences in behaviour patterns.

One of the women had access to the television studio at her college. The first session was largely experimental, as only one of us had used the equipment before; we used simple role playing situations. As well as getting to know the equipment and experiencing what it actually feels like sitting in front of a camera, this was a really good consciousness raising exercise. We found it difficult to relate the images on the screen to our own self image—we want to continue exploring this problem.

One of the ideas we're working on is to explore the distortion (both conscious and unconscious) imposed by the medium and to investigate the results of different ways of filming identical situations. It would be interesting to film men using the usual sexist techniques that are used when women are in front of the camera. After spending more time on this in the studio, we intend to produce a video tape which we can use in schools etc.

We would welcome advice and



encouragement from any women who feel they could help us and would like women in the north east, who are interested, to contact us.

Sally, Jo, Viv, Jane, Gail, Louise and Lin

SOCIALS

We started holding socials in May 1977, alternating them with our 'business' meetings. This was done deliberately as we felt that we could involve more women—some women come to the group through the socials, whereas others come through the meetings. We all feel involved in the group and attend conferences and demonstrations that we believe in. There are obvious advantages in holding regular socials in that we all get to know each other in a relaxed, all-women atmosphere and can have a drink and a bop. We hire a room in a pub in the centre of town and take turns in providing food and music. The socials are advertised in the town, but we concentrate on fun rather than fund raising—though the socials do make enough money to pay for themselves and we've managed to buy a second hand stereo.

We meet at 8pm on Tuesdays at 'The Golden Fleece' and are thinking of holding 'New Women's Meetings' every month to solve the difficulties of making new women feel comfortable in the group.

Viv, Jane and Katie

SELF DEFENCE

Learning how to crush, blind, deafen, kick, punch, dislocate and get out of the way; being aggressive, violent calculating; I've caught myself wondering what the hell I'm doing learning all this—'nice girls don't' and even worse 'nice girls don't need to'. Conditioning runs deep in me, unaware of it most of the time, this self-defence class brings it up—until I'm out late at night alone, then I go over the moves in my mind, I'm ready, I feel less helpless and become, perhaps, the hunted, but not the prey for the first time in my life.

The idea of self-defence classes came out of our discussions at the end of the Reclaiming the Night march (SR 66). A week later the class was organised at the request of 14 of us (all women). We argue a bit about the guy who teaches us—is he okay or not—but not about what he teaches us, how to defend or attack, what to do if the attacker has a knife, etc.

Lying in bed on a Saturday morning I resent having to get up early to be there by nine, that this

SEE

is what I have to do in order to walk the streets without fear. I'm angry but then there's two hours of concentration, grunts, bruises, despair of ever getting it right, laughter, sisterhood, and, for me, pride.

Maybe the last word should go to Jenny, "this is what my mum'll do if a man attacks her—she'll kick and punch, with a fierce face, like a furious windmill." I hope I'll do better than her parody, but I feel a glow that at five she knows what it's taken me till 30 to find out, that we don't have to be passive victims of male violence. Lin

SOCIETY TO SUPPORT HOME CONFINEMENTS

We are concerned at the damage being done to women and children by the enforcement of the Peel Report recommendation of 100% hospital deliveries and want to make it known to women, that they have a real choice as to where they give birth. In 1975 Newcastle Area Health Authority put out a document entitled 'Procedure for requesting a Home Confinement', which stated that 'the present practice of obstetrics no longer makes it a satisfactory procedure for a midwife to accept a patient for home confinement... one would be extremely critical of any midwife who took this action and she may well find herself in the position of having a case of malpractice to answer...'. Our group has been busy uncovering evidence of the systematic destruction of district midwifery over the last 15 years in our area. In 1976 the Newcastle Area Health Authority had five home bookings out of almost 3000 births—13 babies were born before the arrival of medical attention and 19 were born en route to hospital.

Through our group most of the home-birth mothers know each other and have a great sense of solidarity. The power of the local obstetricians to pick off women in isolation at routine hospital check-ups is slowly being defused. We can now warn women who contact us, about the arguments particular doctors will use when faced with a request for a home booking, so a woman can see that a refusal to 'grant' her a home birth is not particular to her, but is part of a general plan to run down the service.

We know our efforts are worthwhile—help us in this struggle so that the district midwife will be reinstated and our daughters will, in their turn, be able to use her services in their homes.

Margaret

CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

Our group started in October 1977 and now consists of seven women meeting weekly at each other's houses. We come from a fairly wide cross-section of backgrounds and our approaches to the group vary quite a bit. What we have in common is concern about our position as women and the belief that there is something to gain in sharing our experiences and thoughts.

Until this group came together we had all followed the development of the Women's Movement individually, without any real involvement or awareness of the strength women can get from each other. So far, for us, the group means we are women giving time to each other, becoming more aware of sexism and discrimination, and getting the strength to deal with it on a day-to-day basis. Also, group solidarity has made us more inclined to participate in wider activities within the movement, which we might have been reluctant to do alone. What happens in the group is hard to describe. What we want to communicate are the positive feelings we have about it and to encourage women to start one for themselves. Anyone who wants advice is welcome to contact us.

Pat, Liz, Sheila, Pat, Laurie, Barbel and Jill

WOMEN'S AID

Newcastle Women's Aid has been going for about five years now. We're in a 300 year old farm house at present, but have recently got a new refuge costing £40,000, which has been paid for with a Government Urban Aid Grant. It's an old presbytery with a large garden and lots of rooms. Also, in the grounds, there's a community hall which will be used by people locally as a centre—we hope to partake in its activities when we move in, around May, and things get going.

We have four workers, including a playworker—two are financed by the Job Creation Scheme, one from our £6000 p.a. urban aid grant and one from our funds. With one grant we applied for 15 of us went to the Lake District for a long weekend. We stayed at Loweswater Hall, run by Ruth and Steve—it's a great place, with a large safe garden and lots of lovely walks. Recommended.

We have fortnightly support group meetings at the refuge, that are attended regularly by six women, two of which were in the refuge before being rehoused. We can always do with more support, so anyone who has the time and energy please contact us.

Rosie



WOMEN'S LIBERATION GROUP - SEXUALITY SUNDAY

Our 'Sexuality Sunday' arose out of an emergency meeting which was called after three lesbians were beaten up at a party. During the incident no one attempted to help them, including the feminists who were there. We channelled the energy of our anger into a discussion of the complexity of the sixth demand and ended up planning the sexuality workshop.

About 20 of us turned up, at first we sat waiting for latecomers—it seemed the 'safest' thing to do. After chatting and practising some self-defence our tensions began to ease and we agreed to split into two groups. In my group we decided to do physical things to break down barriers between and within us. After 20 minutes of non-stop running we worked on getting out sounds—screaming, shouting, releasing the sounds of our feelings. We did some acting out as well, keeping it on a physical level because we found that once we started talking we could talk ourselves round and out of where we really wanted or needed to go. One woman got into her feelings of frustration about the responsibility of being a mother and a worker—not being able to be herself and wanting to cry a lot. Gradually her feelings were becoming lost in words and one of us reacted to this by sitting on her and saying "I'm the world and I'm not going to let you get up..." This brought her back to the feeling and forced her to deal with it, to struggle to get out from under the world.

Overall, in our group, we felt more in touch with our bodies and each other—we'd developed trust and no longer saw our individual problems as unique. We planned to have a series of 'Sexuality Sundays'. Unfortunately the other group's experience was very different—it left such a bad feeling that no one wanted to write about it!

Lou

If you want to write about activities in your city, town or area please contact Barbara Charles, Spare Rib, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Women's Centre and Socialist Centre: 233 Jesmond Road, Newcastle (812266)
Socials and fortnightly Women's group meetings: Viv, Jane and Katie, 112 Simonside Terrace, Heaton, Newcastle 6 or Lou (0830 40381)
Video/film Group: Sally Walker or Jo Colley, 27 Grosvenor Place, Jesmond, Newcastle.
Roadgang Theatre Group: 13 Swinburne Street, Gateshead, Newcastle.
Self-defence classes: c/o Lin (814860)
Consciousness raising group: c/o Liz, 45 Queen's Road, Jesmond, Newcastle
Women's Health Group: Sue Gittens, 65 Beechgrove, Blackhall Mill, Hamsterley Colliery
Women's Aid: c/o Rosie, 21 Eslington Terrace, Jesmond, Newcastle (743594)

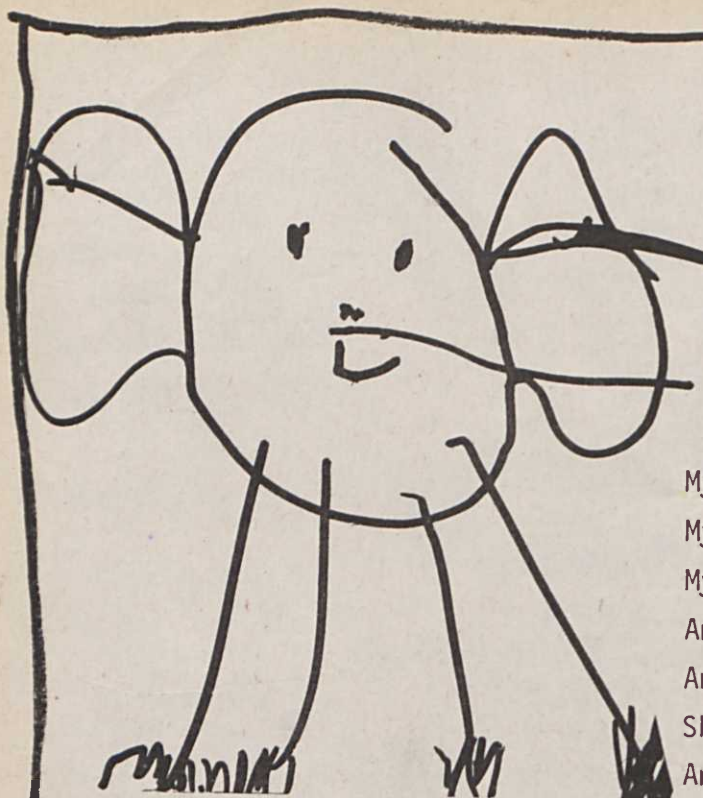
NAC: Jan Dobbie, 13 Swinburne Street, Gateshead, Newcastle
Society to Support Home Confinement: Margaret Wright, 19 Tynedale Terrace, Newcastle 12 (668965)

National Childbirth Trust: Barbara Irvine, 'Hillheads', Heddon-on-the-Wall, Wylam, Northumberland (Wylam 2601)
Socialist Medicine Association: Carol Deseteux, 86 Kingsley Terrace, Elswick, Newcastle 4
Association of Radical Midwives: 19 Tynedale Terrace, Newcastle 12

Citizens Advice Bureau: Mea House, Ellison Place, Newcastle (20832) or 46 Trinity Square, Gateshead, Newcastle (771392)
Family Planning Clinic: 4 Graingerville, Newcastle (39560)
Family Planning Association: Mea House, Ellison Place, Newcastle
Tyne and Wear Resource Centre—providing resources (for community groups and other working class organisations) such as duplicators, screen printing press, tape recorder, camera, projector and rooms for meetings—at: 13 Swinburne Street, Gateshead, NE8 1AX (775615/6)

Cradlewell Books: Socialist Centre
Tyneside Street Press: Editorial address—118 Sidney Grove, NE4 5PE (21371/21148)
The Socialist Centre produce a newsletter regularly.

THE NEWCASTLE CODE
NUMBER IS 0632



My mum doesn't know how to draw elephants

My mum makes the beds,
My mum washes the dishes,
My mum makes lovely custard
And steak and kidney pudding.
And when my dad hits her
She locks herself in the toilet
And doesn't come out for ages.
My mum's got a nice face,
And hair like our dog,
All tangled and ratty.
Her stockings always have holes in.
She doesn't wear lipstick.
My mum fetches me from school
And gives me bread and marmite
And lets me make bubbles
In the bath and draws me good horses.
My mum doesn't know how to draw elephants.
In the night sometimes my mum runs away.
But she doesn't take her toothbrush.
I don't think she goes to visit anyone
Or to stay by the seaside.
When she comes back, her clothes are all dirty,
And her eyes are all red and funny.
But she brings us Smarties
And reads us a special story
And my dad goes down to the pub
And we have a nice time.



drawings by Carole & Natasha

by Sheila Yeger
(from the words of a young friend)



A Smear in Time...

What happens when a cervical smear test is positive?

Al Garthwaite gives a subjective account and

Wendy Collins fills in some medical details.

"You have a slight inflammation which is probably *not* serious, but please come back in three months."

My first smear test in three years. I used to get one fairly regularly at the Family Planning Clinic before I understood I was a lesbian and stopped needing contraception. I didn't have any of the symptoms of bad cervix trouble: no pains, no smelly discharge, no "bleeding after intercourse" or between periods. But my ex-(male)-lover-of-many-years had had a tumour removed from one testicle four months before, so cancer was in my mind. Also a few friends my age had cervix trouble.

Your body is made up of literally billions of tiny little cells. These cells are dying or being replaced all the time. Cancer begins when the new cells grow abnormally, and go on multiplying instead of stopping when enough new cells have been made.

If these abnormal cells can be found quickly and removed, the cancer can be cured. In some parts of your body, cancer cells can't be identified until the illness is causing obvious symptoms; but one of the commonest cancers among women, cancer of the cervix (neck of the womb), can be found and cured long before you can feel that there is something wrong.

Cancer of the cervix begins with abnormal cells in the epithelium (outer layer of the cervix) and if it is not treated, spreads gradually to the underlying tissue and eventually to other parts of the body. The causes are not known but it seems to have something to do with sex with men—nuns almost never get it. It is also connected with social class (more working-class than middle-class women get it). Age of first sexual intercourse (the younger the more likely), age of first childbirth (likewise), being on the Pill and general cleanliness also feature as factors. And some research has shown that it may be connected with genital herpes, an untreatable virus which causes painful little spots on the genitals and can be caught through sex, or gets into your bloodstream and flares

up when you're weak or run down or freaked out.

Abnormal cells on the cervix can be found by a smear test before they become dangerous. A few cells are scraped off the outside of the cervix and examined under a microscope. The tests are done at Family Planning Clinics, ante-natal clinics, special cytology clinics, the VD Clinic or by your GP. It is important to be tested regularly, about once a year.

Women who go to a Family Planning Clinic will usually be tested as a matter of routine, especially if they are on the Pill. Women will also be tested when they are pregnant or at their post-natal examination. But other women will have to make sure they are tested regularly by asking their GP to do a smear, or by arranging to go to a cytology (smear) clinic. If you don't have sex with men, it's still worth checking. It is important to arrange to be tested regularly, and not to wait until there is something obviously wrong with you.

It's unwise to have a bath for 48 hours before you go for a smear or there may not be enough loose cells on the cervix for an accurate test. For the same reason, try not to use tampons, birth control foams, jellies or pessaries, or to douche, for five days before the smear, which shouldn't be done during your period. Properly performed, the test is 95-98% accurate.

So I had the test. It was easy. My GP could have done it but instead I went to the smear morning at a nearby Health Centre. I was 29, unmarried, no kids, one abortion. No-one questioned my right to have the test, I hardly had to wait and the internal exam didn't hurt for once. I knew my cervix looked reasonably OK—I look sometimes with my own speculum. She hadn't been exactly pink and gleaming, and there was some erosion (red patches where the outer layer of cervical tissue, the 'epithelium', has flaked off) but this isn't unusual. Only five out of 1000 women over 35 with erosion have anything seriously wrong. (Pregnant women and those on the Pill often have erosion due to hormonal changes; this usually disappears with the

cause.)

The doctor put in the cold metal speculum, opening up my vagina so my cervix was in view. She took a spatula—a small flat piece of wood the size and shape of an ice-lolly stick, with a dent at one end—and with the dented end scraped a few loose cells off the end of the cervix. I can always feel *something* when this happens, but it really *doesn't* hurt. She then smeared the results—a tiny drop of pink mucus—onto a small glass slide, and that was it.

The smear is sent to a laboratory where it is looked at under a microscope to see if there are any abnormal cells. Infections like Thrush or Trichomonas can also be seen, as their cells look different from normal ones.

If there is anything wrong with the smear you may be asked to go back for another one. But this *doesn't* necessarily mean you've got any abnormality. The test may not have been done properly in the first place, so that there aren't enough cells on the slide. Or an infection can hide the cells so that it's hard to tell if they're normal or not, or the smear may be too bloody if you had a period when it was done.

If you have a test when you are pregnant, you may be asked to come back for another one after the baby is born; this is because some women develop cervical abnormalities during pregnancy, which later go back to normal.

If there is anything wrong, the laboratory can usually get some idea from the smear how bad it is, and can advise your doctor or clinic what to do next. If it is a mild abnormality, you may just be asked to come back for another smear in three months. Very young women who have abnormal smears will often just have repeat smears, perhaps for several years, as the abnormality may go away by itself. It is not dangerous to leave mildly abnormal cells untreated for a while, so long as you're kept under observation, as it can take many years for the cells to develop into cancer—or they may never do so. Out

of every 1000 smears, 20 will be abnormal in some way, but only three will show the changes of early cancer.

Two weeks after my smear test the letter came, advising a repeat in three months. I made an appointment with my GP to find out exactly what was going on. I also read up about the cervix and cancer in *Our Bodies Ourselves*, the *Women's Health Handbook*, and found out a lot from one good friend who'd had a cone biopsy and then a hysterectomy, and another who was doing social research into cervical cancer.

So when I saw the GP I knew what to ask. I knew the name for abnormal cells, 'dysplasia', and that if the cells were very abnormal and numerous, it was 'severe dysplasia', and that might mean they'd take a bit off the end of the cervix to see if the cells were just hanging around on the surface or whether they were 'invasive', that is if they'd begun to burrow inwards, changing healthy normal tissue into malignant cancerous growth.

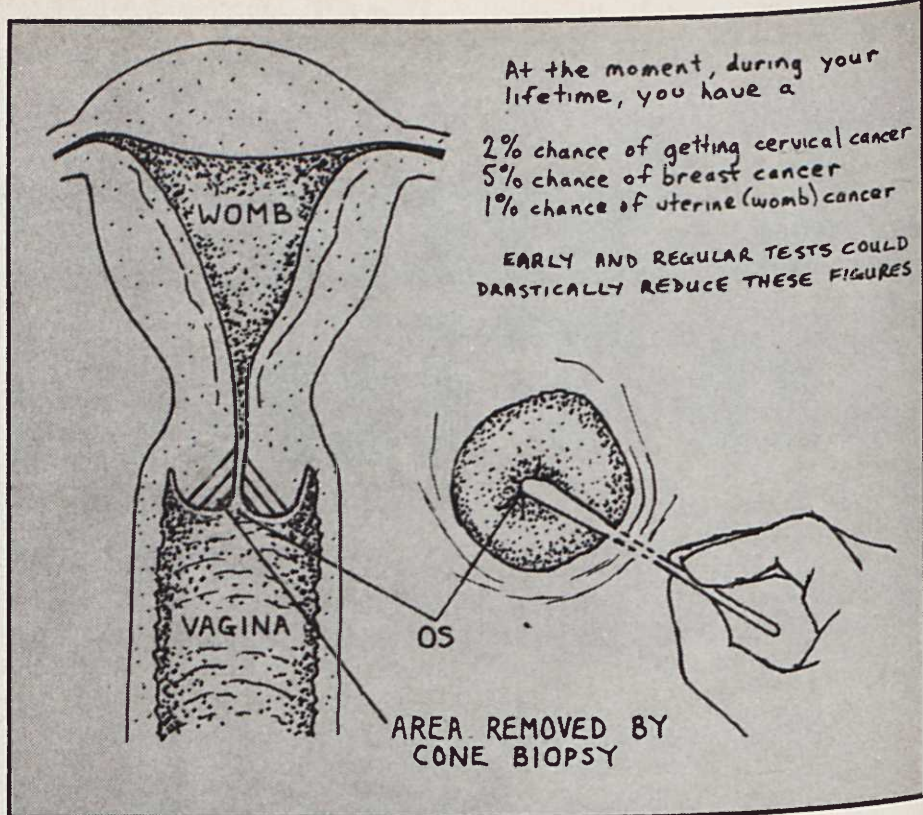
My GP said it seemed moderately severe, but the result might be affected by my being run down or having Trichomonas or another vaginal infection (which I doubted). Anyway, if the abnormalities were still there in three months he'd send me to a gynaecologist.

Waiting was a drag but I had a lot else to think about, and it wasn't long before May came and I was back in the clinic being tested by the same woman doctor. A week later my GP told me the result: severe dysplasia, and they suspected pre-cancerous cells. In other words a lot of abnormal cells, and maybe even cancer on the surface of the cervix, which hadn't started to spread inwards yet. I still had no symptoms, but my cervix didn't look happy: the erosion round the os (entrance to canal leading through the cervix to the uterus) was red and angry, and there was a white semi-transparent veil over it. Somehow it looked sick. I felt very unsexual, but I reckon this was psychological, not physical.

If you have definitely abnormal cells, or if doubtful looking cells are still there after three months, you should be referred to a gynaecologist. She or he (nearly always he) will do an internal examination to see if your cervix looks unhealthy, although even if you've got abnormal cells they may not be able to see anything wrong with the naked eye, and will do another smear test.

Other techniques that might be used at this stage are:—

Colposcopy: the gynaecologist uses a speculum to open up the vagina so that the cervix is clearly visible. S/he then looks at it with a specially designed microscope with a very powerful lens called a colposcope. The microscope doesn't actually go into your vagina, and it doesn't hurt at all. Your cervix will be swabbed with an acetic acid (vinegar) solution, which washes off the mucus and shows up any abnormal areas more clearly. Then iodine will be painted onto your cervix—normal cells stain brown with iodine, but abnormal ones show up white. The gynaecologist can then see



exactly where the abnormal cells are, and will draw a picture so that s/he knows which bits may need to be removed.

Colposcopy is a very useful diagnostic technique but not all gynaecologists use it. It is worth trying to find one who does. (Warning: as in childbirth, abortion, and other dealings with doctors, you may feel treated like a piece of meat and generally messed about with during this process; this is something we must fight.)

Punch biopsy: a very tiny piece is removed from your cervix with an instrument like a large pair of scissors. It's usually done without an anaesthetic, hurts a bit but not too much, and may bleed a bit afterwards. The piece of tissue is sent to the lab so that they can see whether the cells are really abnormal, and get more idea of how bad they are. Some infections, for example severe Trichomonas, can look like abnormal cells to the naked eye, and so by looking at them through a microscope the lab can tell whether they really are pre-cancerous.

The first gynaecologist with whom my GP got me an appointment was the same pig who'd refused me an NHS abortion three years before. No way did I want him, so I asked for another. This was OK and I went to the second doctor's clinic at the hospital about three weeks after my second smear. Not that he ever saw me—a registrar examined me, asked me all about my medical history and whether I wanted 'a family' (I said yes), and then said they'd admit me to hospital as soon as possible for a cone biopsy.

One thing I found out then was that I'd been given a smear test three years ago when being examined for the NHS abortion I didn't get. And this smear had shown positive—there were abnormalities back then. They'd written to my GP about it, I saw the carbon copy of the letter, but he'd

never told me. Perhaps he never got the letter? It wasn't in my files at the surgery, and my then-GP is dead now and can't be asked. Whatever the reason, I reckon I should have been informed as well by the hospital: two letters are unlikely to go astray. Had I known, I might well have made different decisions about having kids, contraception... everything. I could have taken action. It really freaked me out, finding this out. How many other similar 'mistakes' does the NHS perpetrate?

If you do have abnormal cells, what happens next will depend on how bad they are. If they are very mild, or you are very young, or pregnant, you may just be kept under observation. If they are definitely pre-cancerous, you will probably have a cone biopsy. This is done under general anaesthetic. A cone-shaped piece is cut out of your cervix, around the os where abnormal cells usually begin.

This is sent to the lab where it is divided into very small sections, and each one examined carefully. From this the pathologist can tell whether the cancerous cells have grown into the underlying tissue ('invasive') and whether the cone biopsy has removed all the cells.

If the cells are non-invasive, and have been removed by the biopsy, you should not require any further treatment, although you will be asked to come back for tests regularly for the rest of your life.

Still feeling strangely calm, I waited. I was putting half a clove of garlic up my vagina every night: garlic is 'nature's antibiotic' and has been known to cure all sorts of things, including vaginal infections. I also drank raspberry leaf tea morning and evening, which stops you bleeding much. It's a good herb to drink before any operation, as it decreases blood loss during and

SOME TERMS YOU MAY COME ACROSS

BIOPSY: diagnosis by cutting off a small part of the body that's suspected of being abnormal in some way, and testing it

CARCINOMA: cancer

CARCINOMA-IN-SITU: cancer which has not yet invaded the underlying tissue

CELL: the smallest unit of the body capable of independent life; hardly ever visible to the naked eye

CERVIX: the neck of the uterus (womb) at the top of the vagina

COLPOSCOPY: examination of the cervix through a colposcope, a specially strong microscope placed at the entrance to the vagina which shows up the shapes of cells

CONE BIOPSY: removal of part of the cervix, in the shape of a cone, for tests

DYSPLASIA: abnormally developing cells

HYSTERECTOMY: removal of the uterus; sometimes cervix, tubes, ovaries are removed too, but often this is not necessary

INVASIVE CELLS: cells that are growing inwards, changing normal body tissue into abnormal, cancerous tissue

NON-INVASIVE CELLS: cancerous cells that have not yet begun to grow inwards

OS: entrance to the canal through the cervix, from vagina to uterus, the pathway for sperm, blood and babies

PRE-CANCEROUS CELLS: abnormally shaped cells one stage away from being cancer

PUNCH BIOPSY: very small piece of tissue cut out to be tested

RADIOTHERAPY: treatment of cancer by X-Ray which destroys cancer cells near the surface of the body

SMEAR TEST: a few flaky cells scraped painlessly off the surface of the cervix and examined under a microscope for abnormal shapes

SPECULUM: duck-billed instrument for opening up the vagina and viewing the cervix; many women now have their own plastic one, so we can look for ourselves

VAULT SMEAR: smear test taken on a woman who's had her cervix and uterus removed and the far end of her vagina sewn up. The smear is taken from this far end, as if cancer were to redevelop, it would show up here first.

afterwards (if you drink enough it can even stop a period in full flood, till the effect of the tea wears off!) Three weeks passed, then a letter arrived: "Be at ward 20 at 9.30am on Monday June 20."

Ward 20 is a gyne ward, full of women having bits of their reproductive system removed or tested. I arrived and went to bed, feeling perfectly healthy, very hot, and self-conscious about reading Jill Johnston's *Lesbian Nation* chosen as a brave political gesture in the stoned security of home the night before. Then I waited, drank tea, waited, had lunch, waited, and finally saw a doctor who raped me with a speculum and his fingers and only condescended to speak when I started spouting medical jargon. All he could tell me was it'd be tomorrow. I then waited, drank tea, waited, had visitors, waited, and passed a semi-sleepless night bored and upset by the tears and pain of those around me.

Next day was a positive riot of activity, what with having a bath, *all* my pubic hair shaved off, no food, suppositories to make me shit and finally a wonderful jab of pethidine to relax me which almost made it worthwhile being in hospital. I wouldn't like to try and have a baby on it though as you go right out of control, but if you don't have to get anything together, it's great. Then I went down for the op...

I awoke painlessly and apart from being sick into my fruit bowl and having a sore throat from the tube stuffed down my gullet (to stop suffocation from anaesthetic) felt fine. There wasn't any feeling from the cervix though I felt sort of *aware* of it, and not much bleeding—as much as the tail-end of a period. By next morning it had almost stopped, I felt fine and was discharged.

For the next two weeks I had a smelly watery discharge which gradually diminished, and I couldn't wear my tight jeans

as the discharge soaked the crutch and irritated me. Perhaps the heat made it worse: it mightn't have been so heavy in the winter. After six weeks or so I felt quite OK, discharge gone, and could fancy being touched again.

The results came through in 2½ weeks. My GP let me know, otherwise I'd have had to wait five weeks to find out at my next hospital appointment. The diagnosis: "extensive carcinoma in situ but no invasive cells". In other words, widespread cancer on the surface of the cervix, which hadn't started to grow inwards yet.

At this point I did freak out somewhat, as usual when the crisis is over. Got drunk a lot and talked on about it compulsively, woke panicking at 3am, or couldn't sleep at all. Not to speak of the anxiety nightmares. I must have resat 'A' levels in my sleep 20-30 times over July and August.

So I'm OK. I've had two smears since, both negative, and my next isn't for six months. My cervix looks pink and healthy, but lumpy, and the os is bigger and more open than it was before. (After the cone biopsy, the cervix is sewn up to form a new os.) Periods haven't changed significantly, though it does seem as if there's heavier bleeding during the first two days than before—perhaps it gushes through quicker now?

A cone biopsy doesn't affect your ability to get pregnant and have kids at all, but I was advised to do it as soon as possible in case abnormal cells redeveloped.

Sometimes it is hard to tell whether the cone biopsy has removed all the abnormal cells, and some women (estimated between 4% and 7%) do develop cancer again within the next five years. *But* it is not clear whether this is because the original cancerous cells were not removed entirely, or whether it is a completely new abnormal growth.

If the cells are invasive, or the biopsy has not removed them all, you may be advised to have a hysterectomy. This is a successful way of removing all traces of cancer, but find out whether it is really necessary. In the past, hysterectomy was the standard treatment for any cancerous condition of the cervix, and some consultants still do it "just to be on the safe side". If you are older and don't want any more children, some consultants seem to think you don't really need your womb any more. Don't be persuaded that it's a convenient way to be sterilised—sterilisation can be done much more simply, and with fewer after-effects.

If you do need a hysterectomy, ask the doctor whether s/he is going to leave your ovaries in, and if not, why not. They produce a lot of hormones that you need, so keep them if possible. However, if there is any evidence that the cancerous cells have spread towards your ovaries, it probably is best to have them removed.

Either before or after a hysterectomy, you may be given radiotherapy: 'X-Ray Treatment'. X-Rays kill cancer cells more easily than normal cells. The treatment has nasty side-effects, like diarrhoea, vomiting and general weakness, but it may be necessary to stop the cancer. If you can be treated as an out-patient you may find it less of an ordeal. Taking Bio-Strath before, during and after a course of treatment reduces side-effects, and vegetable juices (especially beetroot) which help keep your red-blood-corpuscle level high are also recommended. Many find Vitamin B strengthening, too.

When invasive cervical cancer is revealed in its early stages, there's almost 100% certainty of total cure if you have a hysterectomy.

Abnormal cells most commonly begin in women aged 25-29. My advice to every woman: HAVE A SMEAR. DON'T PUT IT OFF. That *includes* lesbians and celibate women. If abnormalities are caught *early*, later possible cancer can be *prevented*. A hysterectomy is major surgery—there's seldom any need to let it get to this stage. A cone biopsy is less hassle and hurts less afterwards than an early abortion even! So... don't delay. Be tested today.●

Further Reading

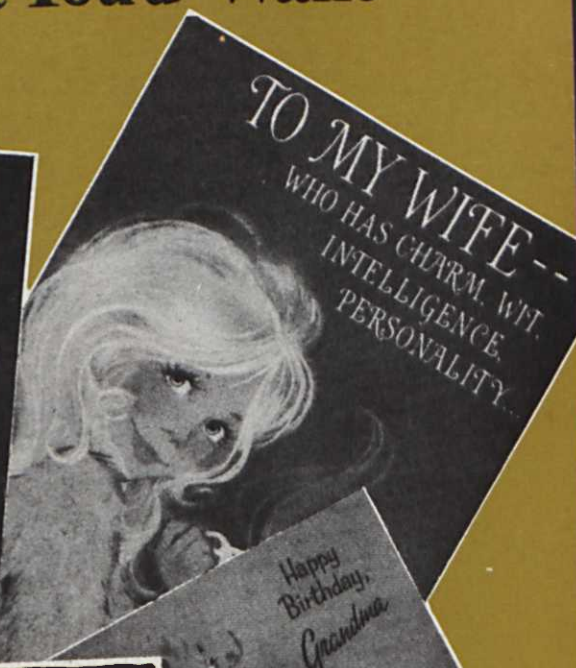
Pre-Clinical Carcinoma of the Cervix Uteri: its Nature, Origin and Management by Coppleson and Reid, pub. Pergamon Press. Should be in any medical library. Useful for health groups, women with some knowledge of medical jargon, and any woman with abnormal cells wishing to know more than we have space for.

Our Bodies Ourselves by the Boston Women's Health Collective (£3.75). Available from feminist and alternative bookshops. Has a section on the cervix, though not a great deal more information than given here, and the experience in USA is different. A revised, British edition, with a thorough section on the cervix, will be published by Penguin in the autumn.

The New Women's Health Handbook ed. Nancy MacKeith (£1.95) published by Virago.

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